

SCOTCH MARRIAGES

AUTHOR OF
"CITOYENNE JACQUELINE"





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SCOTCH MARRIAGES

I.

SCOTCH MARRIAGES

BY

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'SCOTCH FIRS' 'CITOYENNE JACQUELINE' &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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1882

‘ Choose not alone a proper mate
But proper time to marry ’

COWPER

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OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.



LADY PEGGY.

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The Rev. Ray May 56 A. Pennell = 34.

JEAN KINLOCH

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LADY PEGGY

VOL. I.

B



CHAPTER I.

BRIDEGROOM AND BRIDEGROOM'S FRIEND.

DURING the last century there was little real difference between young Drumsheugh and young Balcairnie, the young laird and the young yeoman,¹ who was also the laird's chief tenant and chosen friend. Jamie Ramsay, of Drumsheugh, and Jock Home, of Balcairnie, both rejoicing in a territorial appellation, had sat together on the same bench in the same parish school. For that matter Jock, though not particularly scholarly, as the cleverer of the

¹ In Scotland the distinction between a yeoman farmer—one who owns his farm—and a tenant farmer is not strictly preserved. The term yeoman is, or was, employed indiscriminately to any farmer.

two, had generally sat above his companion. The boys had played together in the same games of ball and hockey. In company they had scoured the fields together after birds' nests, nuts, and haws. They had in their green youth worn and torn the same corduroys little different in quality, and satisfied their hearty appetites on the same wholesome porridge and kail, oatmeal cakes, and 'bannocks o' barley,' for the laird's table was not much more daintily supplied than the farmer's.

Even the lads' homes were on the outside not so different as might have been expected. Drumsheugh had an avenue of crazy fir trees, and the dignity of a ruined tower about a bow-shot from the high, narrow, free-stone house which represented the modern mansion. Balcairnie was just such another house, a storey lower, without the avenue and the tower. It was not destitute of compensation for these deficiencies in the comfortable-looking stack-

yard, which sheltered it from every wind that blew, and in the square of the farmyard which abutted on the house, and was alive and cheerful with domestic animals, and the constant work going on among them. Balcairnie was the livelier dwelling of the two. Both houses had long gardens very similar, prolific in hardy vegetables and primitive fruit, as well as in old-fashioned flowers. The gardens found room for umbrageous bowers and Dutch summer-houses, and included beech and holly hedges, which enclosed washing-greens.

Inside, the best parlour of Balcairnie might have stood for the dining-room of Drumsheugh—furnished as they both were with Scotch carpets and oak, and adorned alike with silver cups, won in coursing matches, and great Chinese punch-bowls brought home by friendly sea captains. The chief difference lay in the fact that the dining-room at Drumsheugh was in constant use, while the *pièce de résistance*

among the apartments in Balcairnie was the ordinary parlour, given over to drugget and blue-and-white checked linen, with ornaments of no more costly material than cherry-wood pipes, pink-lipped shells, and peacocks' feathers. Again, there was no drawing-room at Balcairnie, with spindle-legged chairs in painted satin-wood and white chintz covers, such as was the company room at Drumsheugh. But the boys' bare little garret dormitories were much alike.

On the rare occasions, when the lads went from home, unattended by their parents, they journeyed by one conveyance which served the whole neighbourhood, except on special occasions—Tam Fleemin's carrier's cart.

True, on leaving school young Drumsheugh had gone to the Edinburgh University, as became his birth and rank, while young Balcairnie had entered on the apprenticeship implied in holding a plough and drawing a straight fur-

row under the critical eyes of his father and his father's foreman, according to the standard for young men in his class; but on the return of the one lad from the college and the promotion of the other on the death of his father to the possession of all the pairs of horses on the farm, instead of the obligation to work one pair, the occupations and amusements of the old allies tallied once more at many points.

Young Drumsheugh—young only in years, for his father had died long before Balcairnie's father, and the laird had grown up under the rule of a widowed mother—was a scion of the great house of Dalwolsie, the representative of a family of respectable though not very wealthy country gentry that had held up their heads among their equals for the last three hundred years at least. Young Balcairnie, though his father, grandfather and great-grandfather had been tenants of Balcairnie as long as the oldest living man in the neighbourhood could re-

collect, knew nothing further of his origin than what was to be deciphered on a few mossy stones leaning over in Craigtire kirk yard. These did not condescend to mention whether the Homes of Balcairnie came of the great Berwickshire Homes or not. The rude, half-effaced letters only gave the brief, if graphic, statement that here lay 'the cauld corp' of 'Dauvit,' or Alexander, or John Home, as it might be.

But blue blood must have spoken out very unmistakably, if it had drawn a sharp line between two lads whose rearing, casts of mind, tastes and pursuits were so much in common. For the laird farmed the home farm, and the yeoman was one of the first in the hunting field, though he did not attend the hunt ball. The young men, like the boys, wore as a rule the same every-day suits—no longer of corduroy, but of home-spun. Good brown woollen stuff, shorn, spun, and woven in the

district, diversified by yellow buckskins, boots and tops, red waistcoats, and three-cornered hats. The manly build of the pair rivalled each that of the other. Both were deep-chested, broad-shouldered, long and clean-limbed, with arms, not unused to fencing and boxing, quite capable of keeping the owners' heads. The corresponding legs came out strong at coursing matches without the aid of riding horses, while the feet beat the floor resoundingly in reels and country dances for well-nigh a round of the clock at every merry-making, great and small, far and near. The comely ruddy faces under the three-cornered hats might almost have been those of brothers, except that Drumsheugh was dark and Balcairnie fair in hair and complexion.

The men met at the kirk, they met at the market, they dined at the same table in the George Inn of the little town of Craigie on the market-day, they resorted to the same

coffee-room to read the same newspaper, with its chronicle of war prices, victories of His Majesty's forces abroad, and meal mobs at home, while the laird and the farmer frequently rode home together, so long as their roads were one.

Balcairnie would dine several times at Drumsheugh in the course of the winter, and if the Lady—Drumsheugh's mother—was a thought stately, and kept her visitors somewhat at a distance, all in a perfectly courteous way, that was not the laird's fault. He did his best to make up for it by being 'Jack-fellow-alike' with his tenant when Drumsheugh returned Balcairnie's visits at the farm-house. Indeed it was well known to the Lady herself that Drumsheugh, though he could carry himself well enough in any society, was not guilty of offence against any and was liked in all ranks, showed at this stage of his development a perilous preference for humbler company than

he had been born to. He would rather accompany Balcairnie to a 'maiden'¹ or penny wedding, and enter with all his soul into the prevailing fun and frolic, rendering himself the most acceptable guest in the motley assemblage, than go where Balcairnie could not go with him, to what was by comparison the high and dry hunt balls and subscription assemblies.

There is this to be said in excuse for Drumsheugh's low tastes, that the maidens and weddings—penny and otherwise—not less than the markets of those days were freely frequented by guests—male guests especially—

¹ A harvest-home, so called from the last sheaf of corn cut on the farm for the season. It was allowed to fall to the share of the best shearer or reaper, who tied it up with ribands so that it might take the semblance of a doll. It was then hung conspicuously as the chief adornment of the principal wall of the barn in which the 'maiden'—called in the north of Scotland the 'kirn,' was held. The decked-up sheaf was finally carried home by its proud winner, and suspended on the wall of her cottage, where it was treasured as a token of her prowess.

many degrees higher than the mass of the company. Besides, as is sometimes true in a thinly peopled district, it happened that about the time Drumsheugh came of age, the county circle round him was remarkably deficient in young people of his own age, above all in young people endowed with such attractions as were likely to seize and retain the laird.

Neither could the step be called a great descent, when in mind and manners so many were nearly on one level. For instance, not only had Drumsheugh and Balcairn been fellow-scholars at the same parish school, but another contemporary scholar was little Peggy Hedderwick, the daughter of a hedger-and-ditcher, who had brought her doubled-up scone and whang of cheese tied up in a napkin for her dinner at school, just as she had carried her father's dinner daily when the field of his operations was within a girl's walk from home. Peggy, though she was the junior of both the

lads by some three to four years, had darted nimbly ahead, with the precociously quick wit of girls, in all learning, save sums. She had been 'out of the Testament' and 'into Proverbs' before either of the boys, and she had been such an expert in repeating the shorter catechism, from 'man's chief end' to the Creed, without halt or blunder, that the master himself could not 'fichle' (puzzle) her. She had frequently coached her seniors and betters in that, to them, most difficult performance. As for the Psalms and Paraphrases, she could repeat them by heart in her shrill sing-song, till the master, though he was a licentiate of the Kirk, grew weary of hearing her. It was even seriously believed in the school that she had surmounted the Ass's Bridge of the curriculum and could say right off, if anybody would stay to listen to her, the whole of the Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm. She could write a fine round hand, with an occasional

clerkly flourish at the tail of a letter. It was at sums that Peggy hung her head. The multiplication table, with its barren chart of commercial details, unbrightened by a green spot on which fancy and sentiment could feed, had brought her to grief, and taken the pride of intellect out of the white-headed lassie. The lads who came through this test triumphantly had tried to help her in turn. But it was in vain—poor Peggy would never make even a decent arithmetician. It must only be by counting her fingers that she could ever reckon her earnings and her spendings.

Peggy Hedderwick, grown up into the bonniest lass for many a mile, was now the acknowledged belle of every rustic merry-making in the parish of Craigtire. She was a great deal more and better than such a distinction oftēn implies. She was something else than a blue-eyed, white-skinned, red-cheeked maiden, with a slim yet well-rounded

figure, a pretty foot and ankle, though they went bare six days out of the seven—unless in the depth of winter, a trim waist, a slender throat, a delicate chin, a dainty mouth, as good a nose as if she had been born a Ramsay—or, as far as that goes, a Stewart, and a broad enough brow to explain her early attainments in the Psalms and Paraphrases. She was even something more than an innocent creature in whom there was little guile, a modest child to soil whose modesty would be a gross sin and shame in the eyes of every man worthy of the name. She was an industrious, upright, pious soul, the stay—by means of Peggy's busy wheel principally, of her widowed mother. For the hedger and ditcher, exposed to every inclemency of the weather, had early paid the debt of nature. Peggy discharged faithfully all obligations known to her. She was a reverent, unfailing worshipper—one of the favourite lambs of the flock with the elderly uncouth

book-worm of a dominie, who had progressed from the parish school to the parish kirk, and was in either place an excellent man, master, and minister.

It was to this fair, sweet, and good young Peggy Hedderwick that Drumsheugh, wilful and masterful in his simple condescension, paid unfailing homage. He sought her out—for she never threw herself in his way—wherever she was to be found. He went with Balcairnie under a hundred pretexts to wherever the laird fancied there was the most distant chance of meeting Peggy. To bleaching-greens, quilting-parties, Handsel-Monday games, even kirk-preachings, her sorely-smitten swain followed Peggy desperately. He made little disguise of his infatuation, and put small restraint on his inclinations in scenes, where, as a welcome visitor from another sphere, he was allowed, it must be confessed, a considerable amount of license. He would dance with no

other, he would sit by no other, he would convoy Peggy home when the play was ended.

Soon the state of the case was no secret in the neighbourhood, with its various circles, among them that presided over by the old Lady of Drumsheugh. The folly and the danger, with what would come of it all, were commented on and canvassed everywhere. The sole cover to his actions, which Drumsheugh chose to assume, was that he went about in these lower regions under Balcairnie's wing, as it were. The laird insisted on taking the yeoman with him in all his excursions and escapades.

This was some small comfort to Mrs. Ramsay. Balcairnie was, if anything, the wiser and more prudent of the two, and she felt he was, in a sense, on his honour to protect his friend from the consequences of Drumsheugh's rashness. Perhaps the Lady also counted a little, in the imminence of the

peril—for Drumsheugh was already of age and his own master, on a theory which was prevalent among the gossips. They said Balcairnie had been the first captivated by the charms of young Peggy, though he had at once drawn back from rivalry with his laird, and that Peggy on her part had smiled on the farmer till a bigger star appeared in her firmament.

Even Balcairnie's marriage with Peggy would be a great *mésalliance*, but it would not be so heinous an infringement of all social laws as Drumsheugh's stooping to a cotter lass, either honestly or in sin and shame. Balcairnie's mother as well as his father was dead, his sisters were married, and his brothers out in the world, so that he was a lone man—if a man can ever be called lone, able to disgrace nobody save himself, by an unequal marriage.

The old Lady of Drumsheugh was particularly gracious to Balcairnie at this time. She inquired after his house, if it was in good

repair with the plenishing in order? She hinted at the propriety, no less than the probability, of his stiff old housekeeper being superseded by an active young wife. After the next sentence or two, she went the length of asking meaningly for bonnie Peggy Hedderwick, who was so good to her mother and so clever with her hands. Had she not won the maiden at the last harvest? Was not her yarn more in request in Craigie market than that of any other girl or matron in Craigtire? And the Lady had heard that from Luckie Hedderwick's couple of hens Peggy had reared the finest brood of chickens that were to be seen that Candlemas. Such qualities in a young woman were worth her weight in gold, Mrs. Ramsay declared impressively, with her keen eyes fixed steadily on the listener. She had the greatest respect for that girl. The Lady plainly suggested that a farmer, whatever might be said of a laird, need seek no richer dower with his wife than

Peggy had to bestow. If the laird's mother were a consistent woman, no doubt she would call on Peggy and do the Lady's best to countenance her son's tenant's wife, should Peggy receive the promotion of becoming the mistress of Balcairnie.

To this stroke of policy Balcairnie merely replied by returning the lady's fixed stare, with a full and grave stolid look from blue eyes which were not unlike Peggy's.

If Balcairnie had ever entertained a tender inclination towards Peggy, it made no ill-blood between him and his friend the laird. It was probably early nipped in the bud by the fact that Peggy's favours had been swiftly transferred, ere they were well bestowed, from Balcairnie to Drumsheugh. Balcairnie was once heard reproaching her, more waggishly than bitterly, 'Ay, Peggy, when I gie you a turn in the reel, fient a kiss you grant me now, gin the laird be by.' For Peggy, with all her

virtues, was a woman still. She was caught while her fancy was yet hovering in its flight, by the glamour of superior rank. Both of her admirers were bonnie and fine lads to her, in the first blush of their admiration, and while both were above her in station, there was not much to choose between them. But the lairdship, and perhaps the greater boldness of Drumsheugh, turned the scales, and after a few months of ardent courtship Peggy was as far gone as her lover. She would no more have permitted a comparison between the merits of Drumsheugh and Balcairnie—though the latter was her very good friend just as he was the laird's—than she would have suffered the old bed-ridden mother who had borne her and toiled for her to be matched with any other woman in the kingdom, be she Queen Charlotte seated with her golden sceptre in her hand by the side of King George on the throne.

CHAPTER II.

PEGGY'S WEDDING.

THERE came a crisis to all those thoughtless daring doings, and it did not proceed from the old Lady of Drumsheugh, much as she loved to lead in life. She had ruled with a high hand her old husband, who, if all tales were true, was not an easy person to guide; but his young son, with his easy temper and pleasant speech to the world at large, though he was a good son at home when he was let alone, threatened to prove too much for her.

There was another mother in the case, as has been signified,—poor old Luckie Hedderwick—who had never been considered more

than a sickly 'feckless' body in her best days, and who was now bed-ridden and dependent on her daughter's industry for her daily bread. Whether Luckie had been from the first an accomplished and hardened deceiver so that she could at last bring forward a strategy worthy of the rival mother—the Lady of Drumsheugh; whether the approach of death began to unseal her dim and dull eyes, and to teach the foolish, ignorant old woman wisdom beyond all earthly sagacity; whether the former dominie who visited his aged and sick parishioner at the cottage in Peggy's unavoidable absence, was secretly at the bottom of the manœuvre, Luckie Hedderwick suddenly set an interdict on all future friendship and love-making between Peggy and the laird. The old woman had been till then as silly and inconsiderate as any lass in her teens in taking the greatest pride and pleasure in Peggy's triumphs and conquests, and in encouraging

the girl in what other people held to be Peggy's sins of vanity and unwarrantable ambition; but she now forbade her child, under pain of her mother's lamentations and reproaches—which were worse than her wrath—so much as to have a meeting with the gentleman, if she could possibly foresee and prevent it.

Peggy was broken-hearted and in despair, but she never dreamt of defying, and still less of cheating, her mother.

The laird, arrested in the full force of his passion, was goaded to the brink of madness and driven half beside himself. No more well-understood foregatherings with Peggy; no more interceptings of the girl on her way to the well, or the shop, or a neighbour's house; no more strolls among the whins and broom¹ in the twilight, careless who saw; no more walk-

¹ He's low down, he's in the broom,
That's waiting for me.

ing of his horse—or leaping from the saddle and walking himself—beside her when he came up with her, which he was pretty sure to do, on the return of both from Craigie market; no more climbing of the breezy, heathery hill and descending on the other side where the green trees shaded the road, throwing a white shower of blossom there in the spring, being full of birds singing as they rifled the fruit in summer, and in autumn dropping blood-shot leaves among the mud and mire. The laird would gallantly insist on placing Peggy's basket before him on the saddle, or would carry it for her. Balcairnle either trotting on with a passing nod, or falling discreetly into the background, determined to show that he was not curious over much, or bent on spoiling sport.

The spectacle had hardly been an improving one. The young laird had been demeaning himself in some lights, trifling with a poor country girl, and exposing her, as he

ought not to have done, to serious misconstruction and harm. Peggy, like a senseless girl, had been laying herself open to scandal and slander and a hundred graver dangers. Still the pair had been a pretty pair, however ill-matched—there is no denying it. The laird in his riding-coat and boots and tops, gaily flourishing his silver-mounted whip; Peggy in her blue-and-red striped linsey-woolsey petticoat, white apron, blue-and-buff striped jacket, and her duffle mantle if it chanced to be wintry weather; her fair hair either bare and tied up with a riband—the relic of the old snood or cockernonie, or else covered by a Bessie-kell—a quilted cotton or woollen hood—under the curtains of which the bonnie face beamed with the mingled shyness and gladness of a child's face.

In a similar manner the larger groups, in which many minor figures had been represented with varying effect, were effaced from

the canvas. These had shown Peggy on the harvest field where the laird, like Boaz of old, shared the labour and the mid-day meal of his servants. Detaching Peggy from the rest, he would act as ‘bandster’ to her shearing, or he would sit at her feet, and decree that as an equivalent to dipping her morsel in the vinegar, she should have her choice of the scones in the basket and the first draught of ale from the pitcher. In those days Peggy was the queen of the autumn fields—a gentle queen who bore the honours thrust upon her meekly. Still she did not fail to arouse animadversion, and the entire *tableau* tended rather to the entertainment than the edification of the spectators.

The sensations of the company were not of a much more generous or amiable description when Peggy was persuaded to fling her handkerchief to Drumsheugh in the coquettish old dance of ‘The Country Bumpkin;’ or when, at the en-

treaty of her lover, she sang with her flute-like pipe to a decorously hushed assembly, or sat as mute as a mouse while he sang in his trumpet tones. Her song might be ‘Ye Banks and Braes,’ or ‘Aye wauken O! wauken aye and weary’—both of which ditties held tender warnings to heedless girls, if they would but have taken the hints—or it might be some blyther measure. But his song never varied. It was always the bold, barefaced declaration—

Young Peggy blooms our bonniest lass,
Her breath is like the morning,
The rosy dawn, the springing grass
With early gems adorning.

with a peculiar emphasis on the verse—

Ye powers of honour, love, and truth,
From every ill defend her;
Inspire the highly-favoured youth
The destinies intend her.

The laird could not stand the abrupt, harsh interference which in the twinkling of an eye dissolved these enchanting scenes. It

would cost him his wits. He would rather carry off Peggy, with or without her will, where nobody should ever come between them. What did she mean by giving him up at any third person's word, be that person her mother twice over? Had the two-faced lass no heart in her breast? He would be upsides with her yet, for the pain and mortification she was causing him. He confided all this to Balcairnie, who gave no further answer than a shake of his head and a resolute 'I'll no be your man in sic an ill job, Drumsheugh,' so the laird went on fuming and storming if he did not speak of 'louping ower a linn.'

The comical side of the question was that he was his own master all the time to do what he liked in the circumstances. He had been left the Laird of Drumsheugh without limitation. He could marry Peggy Hedderwick to-morrow, in spite of his mother, and it was not likely that Peggy or her mother for her, would

decline a plain offer of marriage from so high a quarter, or that either would draw so fine a distinction as to refuse the proposed honour, unless it were accompanied by the free and full consent of the Lady to her son's throwing himself away.

But, somehow, the laird stopped short of such rank insubordination and thoroughgoing independence. There was a strain of weakness in his wilfulness, or else the times were against him. People had not yet shaken off the old feudal prejudices. Drumsheugh, in his simplicity and homeliness, was still, both in his own estimation and in that of other people, the Laird, the scion of the great house of Dalwolsie, and Peggy was the cotter lass, come of hynds and nobodies. Balcairnie, who was not so far before her in the last respect, might have married her without reservation, though she was by no means his social equal; but the most disinterested unworldly version of

the affair which the most single-hearted judges looked for from Drumsheugh was that he should be found fond enough of Peggy, and faithful enough to her, while he was sufficiently regardless of his own interests, to engage in a secret ancient troth-plight equivalent to a marriage with her, and right in the eyes of the law, though it was censurable by the Kirk. It would be a contract which must hamper him all his days, and if he were ever so far left to himself as to seek to evade it, might drag him down to crime and misery. Why on such small temptation, out of two courses—the one clear and above-board, the worst consequences of which would be faced at once—the other a flattering more than half-cowardly compromise done in the dark, and only coming to the light and encountering the natural results after a long interval—a manly fellow like the laird should inevitably, as if it were a matter of necessity, have adopted the second and lower course,

remains a testimony to the force of habit and of one-sided reasoning.

The laird had been accustomed to set his mother at nought in what seemed right in his own eyes. He was not dependent on her in money matters, and did not give a thought to the risk of forfeiting the savings of her jointure, since he was at this stage of his development as free-handed as he was open-hearted. Still, he could not summon up his courage to brave the high-spirited, determined old woman altogether. In the same way he could not make up his mind to despise the clamour and opposition of his circle of gentry, little as he had hitherto prized the hereditary association with them.

Drumsheugh, when he was compelled to a decision, never dreamed of a more generous and honourable step than that of running away with Peggy, and vowing that he was her husband before two available witnesses; nay, the idea of anything less temporising and more

magnanimous did not even cross Balcairnie's mind. It was in serene satisfaction with the concession that he agreed to back the laird as usual in waylaying Peggy, in spite of her mother's commands, and in propounding to her the grand yet sorry expedient for getting rid of all objections in future, by establishing the couple in the sure, if unacknowledged, relations of man and wife.

After some spying and picking up of floating information, the two friends learnt that Peggy, while she now kept religiously indoors with her mother, for the most part of her time, was in the custom of recompensing the neighbour who went most of the girl's errands. This reward consisted in Peggy's 'ca'ing,' or driving out, the neighbour's cow in the cool of the morning and late evening of the June season, to feed for an hour or two on the grass by the dyke sides and ditches, or on the short turf of a single knowe, which rose in solitary dignity

among the flat corn-fields. The road to the knowe was for a certain distance that to Craigie, so often trodden in happier circumstances. The knowe itself, with its patches of rushes, had been Peggy's seat when as a child she had played at plaiting the 'thrashies' into a crown and sceptre. She was an only child like her lover, and had known few playmates save her school companions. She had been used to lonely hours and single-handed games. Her most intimate friend in later times had been her ardent admirer the laird, whom she was now forbidden to see or speak to. He had been with her on this knowe when the dew lay on the grass and the corn-craik was 'chirring,' as it was at the present moment. He had made a posy for her of what Peggy merely called 'bonnie floors,' but which were in detail the dead white grass of Parnassus that grew among the rushes, together with the crimson and pink fumitory and the yellow

avens which he had gathered idly as they came along, leaving hedge-row and dyke-side behind them. He had shown the greatest kindness and patience in helping her to draw out the pith of the rushes and plait it—no longer into a mock crown and sceptre, but into a real wick for her mother's cruizie.

All these soft recollections proved too much for poor Peggy, as she ca'd Hawkie; the girl put up her apron to her eyes to dry the blinding tears which rendered her more incapable of detecting prowlers in her vicinity.

Then with the practical agility of the riever of old, the laird 'cam' skipping ower the hill' from the little hollow on the other side, to which he and Balcairnie had ridden, and where the latter stayed with the horses.

In a moment Jamie Ramsay was by the sorrowful girl's side, detaining her when she sought to retreat.

Peggy wore her summer house dress, the

pretty light cotton jacket which has been immortalised by Wilkie and Sir William Allen. It had a little collar or 'neck,' turned over where the sunburn of the throat met the whiteness of the bosom, and was only confined at the waist by the string of her apron. Her round arms were bare to the elbow, the sleeves of her jacket being rolled up for convenience' sake. The arms were mottled and dimpled like those of a child. Her brown little feet too were bare. Her uncovered hair was arranged in the most primitive style—after all it is the fashion of the great Greek statues. The locks 'which the wind used to blaw' were 'shed' behind the ears, wound round the head, rippling in natural ripples as they were wound, until they were fastened in a knot at the back of the shapely head. Yet no stately ball-room belle in flowing gauze or rustling brocade, with high-heeled shoes and a higher powdered *tête*, had ever appeared half so sweet as Peggy to

the enamoured young laird. He was not caught in undress. He came a-courting her—as he was bound to do, though she had been a beggar maid, and not merely an industrious cotter lass, who supported herself and her mother by the fruits of her honest industry. He wore his best snuff-brown coat, his last flowered waistcoat, his dress buckles in his shoes, with his dark hair combed carefully and neatly back and tied in a *queue*, the riband of which, in skilfully disposed bows and ends, hung half-way down his shoulders.

‘I mauna bide. Let me gang, laird. Oh! why are you here, when I canna lichtlie my mither’s word?’ cried the faithful and despairing Peggy, with streaming eyes and heaving bosom, torn as she was by conflicting obligations.

‘Na, but hear me, Peggy,’ insisted Drum-sheugh, strong to carry the day in his confidence in the honesty of his intentions, and the truth of what he was going to say. ‘Take a message

from me to your mother, and she will not stand in our gate, or make another thrawn rule to keep us apart. Tell her I am willing to join hands with you and exchange written lines. Lass, I'll take the half-merk with you the morn if you like; neither king nor minister has power to come between us after that. You'll be to all intents and purposes my wife and the young Leddy of Drumsheugh from that moment.'

Peggy was not only staggered, she was deeply touched and proudly joyful. She had it in her power to become the 'Leddy of Drumsheugh.' The laird had vindicated his sincerity and honour. There was no more question of tampering with her affections and betraying her trust. He had come out of the test nobly, as not one man in a thousand would have come.

Peggy had not the least doubt that her mother would feel more than satisfied—she would be greatly uplifted by her daughter's wonderful good fortune. Instead of thwarting

Drumsheugh again in his wildest fancy, Mrs. Hedderwick would now defer to his least whim, and consent to pay him the humblest, most grateful homage. Peggy was ready to go with the laird to her mother and see if it were not so—to settle for life her grand and happy destiny.

The laird, carried out of himself by the excitement of the moment, delighted with the effect of his words, thinking himself nearly as true and kind as Peggy thought him—more in love with her than ever—was prepared to start that instant to fulfil his pledge and knock the nail on the head.

To Luckie Hedderwick, accordingly, the infatuated couple went straightway, without an attempt at concealment, widely removed as they were, in the exaltation of their feelings, from any consideration of prudence. They only waited till Drumsheugh hallooed for Balcairnie to come up and wish Peggy and

the laird joy, and then to bring on the horses to the Cotton.

Poor old Luckie, lying powerless in her box-bed, could hardly believe her fast-failing eyes and ears, when Peggy came in (followed by Drumsheugh in full feather), and when he sat down on the kist in the window, which was the only disengaged seat, her own arm-chair being occupied by the unmannerly cat, and Peggy's stool at the wheel taken up by the tray of reeled pirns of yarn.

There was no vow of vengeance on the laird's smooth brow, or of reprisal on his smiling lips. On the contrary, there was the most abundant security and provision for Peggy Hedderwick in his presence there in her mother's cottage, and his frankly undertaking to marry the lass at once, before competent witnesses. It was not from such a good end as this that her conscience and her minister alike had begun to frighten the widow. Her

dear little Peggy would be a lady after all, and some day she would take her stand among the best and be freely acknowledged by the whole of the county side. She could not expect that just at first, but anyway she would be kept an honest and innocent woman. Her children, if she ever had children, would be born in lawful wedlock. She need neither fear God nor man, and poverty would no longer hover at her door, only held at bay by her courageous, diligent young arm.

Of course, it was not for Mrs. Hedderwick to say the laird nay. It was for her to thank him from a lowly, thankful heart for not merely doing justly by her daughter, but for being minded to endow her with his favour and with her share of his portion of the world's goods, which many people would reckon far beyond her deserts.

A glimpse of Balcairn and the horses as they walked up and down the road, which the

old woman saw through the bole of a window at the head of her bed, completed the dazzling of any sense Mrs. Hedderwick possessed. She described the scene afterwards as too splendid for this world—like a verse of the Bible, or a line of an ‘auld ballant.’ It was as when ‘Abraham’s servant bauld the lassie munt and ride wi’ him to be the wife of his maister’s son. To be sure the horses were camels then, whatever the odds. It was as when the auld knicht crossed the sea to bring the king o’ Norrowa’s dochter ower the faem to be his queen, and then the nags were boats—whilk it was a mercy they were not here, lest the cobbles had coupet wi’ her Peggy among the prood waves, as gude Sir Patrick Spens’s ship sank down, in forty fathoms deep. Whatever, it was a maist fine ferlie for Drumsheugh to come wooing and speering for her dochter at a puir body like her, and for Balcairn—with whose mither, worthy woman, she hersel had been a

servant lass for three year afore she and Simon Hedderwick yoked thegither—to sit or stand at her door wi' the beasts in braid daylight, in the sicht of the whole Cotton, as gin she were the leddy and Balcairnie the serving-man.'

The entire arrangements were agreed on that evening, the laird chalking them out very much according to his vagrant fancy, Peggy and her mother assenting with meek, swelling hearts, simply entering a humble protest and venturing on a mild amendment when he suggested a clean impossibility. It would be far pleasanter as well as safer, since the marriage was not to be made public immediately, for the affair to take place from home. Peggy had a cousin—a decent man—a cow-keeper near Edinburgh. She could go on a visit to his wife. Such a visit would be made worth the couple's while ; in fact, they were likely to be filled with importance at the part they were called on to play. Drumsheugh and

Balcairnie could easily take a ride to town treading on Peggy's heels early one fine morning, or late one propitious evening; Peggy, with her cousins to bear her company, and the laird, with Balcairnie as his supporter, would join in a stroll to look at the shop windows or admire the big houses, until they reached the particular house the laird spoke of as the Temple of Hymen, to the mystified ears hanging on his words. There Peggy and he would take the half-merk together in the most popular mode. They would acknowledge themselves man and wife, and sign the lines before some queer sort of mass-John and a notary, as well as before Peggy's cousins and Balcairnie; and the knot would be so securely tied that only death could sever it. Peggy would come back to her mother and the Cotton, and he would return to his mother and Drumsheugh. Nobody need be any wiser till the couple chose to proclaim what had been

accomplished, when he should be at liberty to put his wife into his mother's seat. But he felt sure his Peggy would not refuse to bide a wee for her honours, and would not weary while she had his love and care. And Mrs. Hedderwick would not seek to come between the pair when they were man and wife.

Peggy would not weary, would not refuse to wait a hundred years—always supposing she lived a century and retained Drumsheugh's unshaken love and faith while the years lasted. Was she to dictate terms and exact favours which were far beyond her original estate? She would be well off if Drumsheugh owned her for his wife, though it were but with his dying breath. As for Luckie Hedderwick, she would no more interfere with the laird's rights when he had established them, than she would challenge the prerogative of the King.

It all came to pass as Drumsheugh had or-

dained it. In an irregular and yet in a deliberate, formal manner, quite legal according to the liberal law of Scotland, and with ancient custom to justify the act, by no mock marriage, but by a binding rite, as both knew, Jamie Ramsay wedded Peggy Hedderwick. No exposure followed the event, though it did not go unattended by vague suspicions and fitful rumours. Such marriages were not so unheard of as to prevent the signs of their recurrence from being quickly noted and eagerly caught up.

But as the Lady of Drumsheugh did not see fit to cause an investigation, to cross-question her son, or to go out of her way to assail and harass Peggy; as Peggy's mother in her box-bed did not stir in the matter by proxy; as it was the old daffing intercourse between the laird and the lass, which was openly resumed, and went on much as formerly to hoodwink the public, what was everybody's

business proved nobody's business. Nothing was said or done to clear up the mystery as to the precise terms on which the Laird of Drumsheugh stood with the lass of low degree.

CHAPTER III.

PEGGY'S WELCOME HOME.

BALCAIRNIE could have spoken out and enlightened the neighbourhood, but he did not. Affectionately attached as he was both to Drumsheugh and Peggy, he had not as yet any strong temptation to speak out and shame the Devil, while delivering his victims. Granted that the position was most awkward and indefensible, it had not become so untenable as to shock and scare a man like Balcairnie—not wholly unaccustomed to such difficult conditions—into breaking his word and exposing the offenders, with whom he had been ‘art and part,’ for the good of one or both.

It was hardly possible that Drumsheugh's passion would remain at its first white heat. It was too probable that it might pass into weariness, even disgust, where the poor girl he had married was concerned. True, there had been no such fundamental disparity between the two as may be imagined. Still, Drumsheugh was a man with a man's power of varying his life. He could not rid himself of his blue blood and his lairdship. The likelihood was that the longer he lived their claims on him would increase and intensify, till what he had slighted in his youth might, in inverse proportion, become a heavy chain on his mature years. He might come to clutch his hereditary advantages and brandish them in a surly fashion in the face of poor Peggy, who not only lacked such on her own account, but would to a considerable extent qualify and damage her husband's privileges. The shallowness of the laird's nature, in the

middle of its single-heartedness and transparency, would tend to this result.

In the meantime Peggy, arrested and isolated by her own deed, instead of moving on and becoming transplanted, would stand still or retrograde in her false suspended position. Half envied, half doubted, and blamed by her former equals, wholly distrusted and shunned by those who were still her social superiors, her heart would grow sick under the painful ordeal, her gentle, modest nature wax bold and defiant. The very appearance of evil—which is to be avoided in its turn—would work much of the harm of the evil itself.

But long before this deplorable conclusion was reached, within three or four months of the unceremonious marriage, while the laird was still the fond bridegroom and Peggy the tender bride, an accident happened which brought matters to an unexpected crisis.

One windy October afternoon the laird had been helping to take down the first new stack to be thrashed or flailed out from the stack-yard of the home-farm, when by some chance he missed his footing, fell headlong from the stack-head among the horses' feet below, and received a kick in the chest from one of the startled horses. He was taken up insensible and carried to the mansion-house. The misadventure created a lively sensation, and the news gathered gravity and tragic horror as it spread abroad.

It was said that Drumsheugh was dead, that he had been vomiting blood, that he had never spoken, that he had cried loudly for Peggy Hedderwick to bid her a last farewell. In the conflicting testimony one serious bit of evidence was certain. Dr. Forsyth had been summoned post-haste from Craigie. Balcairn had been seen riding like a madman from his biggest potatoe field, in which the gatherers

had been toiling anxiously all day, for frost was in the air, and if the potatoes were not 'pitted' in time there would be havock among the earth-apples.

It was almost night-fall before the calamitous tidings got Peggy's length. They were thrown in at the half-open door of the cottage in which she and her mother dwelt, by an ill-conditioned drunken brute of a carter, who was driving by, and had caught a glimpse of the girl as she moved about between the dim gloaming without and the fire-light within. In the spirit of mischief and strange pleasure in inflicting pain which belongs to very small, low, and morbidly hostile natures, just as the man in other circumstances might have pelted her with a snow-ball in which lay lodged a cruelly sharp stone; so he called out to her in a bullying, inhumanly indifferent tone, 'Hey! Peggy Hedderwick, what are you doing there? Do you ken your fine laird's felled? He's met

his dead in the corn-yard of Drumsheugh an hour or twa syne.'

Peggy gave a piteous, plaintive cry, like that of a wounded hare—the most helpless, timid creature in its misery; but she did not sink down or faint away, and the next moment she was beginning to make nervous preparations to set forth for the scene of the disaster. She would not listen to her startled mother, imploring, in the mingled terror and weakness of age, for the explanations and reassurances there was nobody to afford. The informant had driven off after launching his thunderbolt, and the occupants of the neighbouring cottages were still about in the potatoe fields. 'I maun gang to him at aince,' Peggy kept muttering as she groped instinctively in the waning light for a shawl to fling over her head—not so much as a shelter from the bitter blast which had been scouring along the floor and causing her to spin by the warm hearth-side, as with

a lingering sense of what was womanly and fitting, because it would not be wiselike in a lass to go abroad at such a season without a screen from inquisitive eyes. ‘He wouldna forbid me ony mair. He’s my man. Oh! Jamie, Jamie, if you’re felled outright, and there is nocht left for me to do for you, but to streek you and dress you in your dead-claes, it is for your puir lassie’s—your wife’s hand, to steek your een and kame your hair for the last time. I dinna mind your leddy-mither now; I’m nearer to you than she is, and I’ll daur her to do her worst the nicht—as if the worst were not come already, gin my Jamie be felled dead! Wae’s me! wae’s me! And it was but this mornin’, and no a terrible lifetime syne, that he clasped and kissed me at parting.’

Peggy did not even notice to lift off the gridle on which cakes were toasting. She who had been reared in the most frugal habits was

abandoning the good oaten bread which must 'scouter' unheeded. The room was full of the sharp, searching smell of scorched outmeal, at which every mouse in the farthest recesses of its hole in the clay biggin' was snuffing with relish as at the potent odour of toasted cheese.

Luckie was feebly protesting and whimpering over the waste; when Peggy unheeding stepped across the threshold and ran right against Balcairnie in the act of entering.

'Balcairnie, is the tale true? Is he living or dead? For the love o' Heaven, speak,' gasped Peggy, clasping the friendly arm and making as if she would fall on her knees at the yeoman's feet, treating him like the arbiter of fate.

'Oh! Balcairnie, sir, will you stop her—she winna mind me—frae goin' on a fule's errand?' implored Luckie from her bed, wiping her bleared eyes with a blue checked linen handkerchief; 'and gin you will forgie me for the

liberty, will you turn the cakes and tak' them aff, or do something to hinder sic a wicket throwing awa' o' gude victuals and me no able to steer a finger.'

'Canny, canny,' remonstrated the doubly-assailed Balcairnie. 'Yes, Peggy, he's livin' and life-like in spite of this mischanter, thank his Maker and yours and mine—no me. Oo, ay, gudewife, I'll see to the cakes. Mony a time I had a hand—not always a helping hand—in your bakings—do you mind? When you were my puir mither's douce lass and I was a mischievious deil o' a laddie birslin' peas among your bannocks.—Peggy, have I given you time to draw breath? If so, you maun come wi' me this minute. I'm sent to fetch you: no by Drumsheugh alone, by his mither the Leddy: "Go and bring Peggy Hedderwick here," were her words, and you maun haste ye to do her bidding.'

But Peggy hung back. The reaction had

come. She was relieved from her depth of despair and extremity of fear for Drumsheugh's life. Her old childish dread of the Lady and reluctance to encounter her reproaches and scorn revived in full force. 'Oh, Balcairnie, I canna gang,' she protested incoherently, twisting her fingers. 'Does he want me? What has she sent for me to do to me?'

'To gie you your paiks (whips),' Balcairnie, who was somewhat of a humourist in his way, could not resist saying dryly, taking off the abject fright of poor Peggy. But the kind fellow relented the next moment. 'If so, Drumsheugh and me had need to come in for muckle heavier skelps, as the Leddy is a just woman, who has a name for uprightness, and has ta'en pride in the fact all her days. Na, Peggy, dinna be a cawf,' he admonished her with great friendliness though little ceremony. 'You maunna stand in your ain licht. You must tak' the wind when it blaws in your barn

door. Forbye you maun obey your gude mither and your man, like a gude bairn. Drumsheugh cried for you as soon as he cam' to himself, and vowed he but to see you richted, or it's like his mither the Leddy might not have minded your existence or mentioned your name. And he does want you, lass, for his breast has gotten a bit stave in from that ugly brute's cloot; he's lying groaning and peching yonder, though the doctor promises to put him richt in a wheen weeks or months.'

Thus urged and alarmed anew, Peggy prepared to go home to Drumsheugh a weeping, downcast bride with a troubled home-coming—altogether different from the happy woman making the triumphant, if late, entrance on her honours which she and her laird had confidently pictured to themselves.

Balcairnie would not suffer Peggy to tarry for any change of dress. He had spoken

the truth and he was fain to hope the best, but he was by no means so sure as he tried to pretend of the laird's ultimate recovery, or even of his long surviving the bad injury he had received. And when Peggy detected some gleam of this dire uncertainty in the mind of his friend where her husband's fate was in question, she had no more heart to put on her best clothes and seek humbly to make as favourable an impression as could be hoped for, on the mind of the Lady.

Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay had often enough seen Peggy before, and till lately had been in the habit of speaking to her in a gracious condescending way, becoming in a laird's mother, when the girl worked in the fields, or carried in her yarn and eggs to the market at Craigie. But that notice and these salutations had been bestowed on Peggy Hedderwick, a cotter lass. It was Peggy Ramsay, the Lady's son's wife by a lawful though summary marriage, who in

other circumstances might have been tremblingly desirous to prepossess the dowager-lady in the younger woman's favour.

As it was, Peggy could but take down from their respective 'cleeks' her ordinary duffle cloak and rustic straw bonnet as the articles of dress which came readily to her hand, and tie their strings in such desperate speed and confusion that they at once fell into 'run knots,' which must be cut or torn asunder before she could be freed from their encumbrance when she arrived at Drumsheugh.

'God bless you, my lass, gin this be fare-you-weel,' her mother's quavering voice said wistfully, and Peggy minded so far as to turn quickly before quitting the room and bend over the prostrate figure with a half-choked reply, 'Mither, Merrin will be in next door or I'm weel gane, gin you gie a chap she'll look ben and see to you. If I dinna come back the nicht, I'll send ower the first thing the

morn, and I'll never forget you, mithier, only I can think o' naething but him the nicht.'

Peggy had no other idea than that she would trudge on foot all the way through the cold, darkness and storm, too thankful to have Balcairnie's escort to Drumsheugh. But he had made a more considerate arrangement, though his care for Peggy had not impelled him to so bold a measure as ordering out the Drumsheugh coach to fulfil the lady's commission and for Peggy's benefit. When it came to that, he had never dreamt of such a step. Peggy and the family coach—the chief symbol of the country gentry's rank and state, were still far apart even in Balcairnie's loyal eyes. If Peggy should ever arrive at ordering out the Drumsheugh coach, and driving in it at her pleasure, as another young Mrs. Ramsay might have done in the sense of an unquestionable right, it could only be after a considerable

apprenticeship still to sufferance and dependence on the part of the low-born wife.

Balcairnie had merely brought his horse, with a pillion fastened to the saddle. There was no 'louping-on-stane' at the cot-house door. Nobody except the laird had been in the habit of mounting and dismounting there, any more than of driving up in a coach with horses taken from the plough. But the example of Katherine Janfarie's lover, though it had not yet been sung in more than the rough border ballad, could very well be followed in one respect—

He's mounted her hie behind himsel',

At her kinsmen speer'd nae leave.

Balcairnie was far too true, generous, and reverent, with too well-balanced a mind in his yeoman estate, to find a further analogy in the situation. But it was on the cards that he should have his thoughts, as he rode on,

stooping forward to see and guide his horse in the gathering night and tempest on the rough road, with the feeble woman's arms clinging to him. For Peggy became forced, in order to keep her seat, to cling tenaciously to the other rider, and let her drooping head rest on his friendly shoulder, as she shook and quivered with the sobs into which she broke out now and then in her distraction and dismay, and as she was further flung here and there by the hard trot over the stones and through the holes, in a painful, perilous mode of locomotion to which she had been totally unaccustomed. Did he ask himself was it thus that Peggy would have held by him and depended on him utterly, had that vision which he was supposed to have entertained for a fleeting moment come to pass long ago—had she been for more than a year now the goodwife of Balcairnie, and had he been taking her home as a common event from kirk, or market, or

friendly visit in scenes where she had already established her claim to be treated like the best of the company? Faithful as he was to the laird no less than to Peggy, Balcairnie knew that in such a case it would have been infinitely better for Peggy, whatever it might have been for himself.

Other thoughts and associations thronged thickly on the young couple as they rode on in their excitement and suspense. The first snow of the season began to fall blindingly and blow strongly in their bent faces, before they passed between the two battered pillars originally crowned with stone balls, one of which had fallen down and been suffered to lie, like a decapitated head, at the side of the entrance to the avenue. By some means the stone ball had become split in two and could not be replaced on its site. In this condition the two halves always reminded Balcairnie, who was tolerably familiar with Scotch history, though

it was the only history he had ever read, of that unlucky De Bohun, Earl of Essex, whose head good King Robert clove with his battle-axe, just to give the blustering champion of England his due, and as an earnest of the feats the warlike monarch was to perform that day on the field of Bannockburn.

Balcairnie sought to cheer Peggy by claiming the snow as a good omen; she was 'ganging a white gate,' which, as everybody knew, boded high prosperity to a bride. But, in spite of themselves, another and very different picture arose in their minds. It was that which in song and legend has formed the burden of many a local tragedy. The scene is familiar to all when the betrayed and ruined woman wanders in her despair to her cruel lover's door, while the 'whuddering blast' pierces her to the marrow, and the deadly white and chill snow threatens to prove her

winding-sheet. She knocks, and implores piteously in vain for admission and shelter. 'Oh, ope, Lord Gregory, ope the door!' cries the sobbing, wailing voice, fast sinking into everlasting silence.

Balcairnie and Peggy were now riding down the avenue of firs, sombre in the height of summer, with their black canopies blacker than ever under their powdering of white, while the bare stems were 'swirled' by the wind in the wildest, dreariest manner. The ruin of the old tower was faintly visible. Shaken as it was, with its loose stones rattling in the hurly-burly, it seemed as if it might fall and crush Peggy in punishment of her heinous sin against the ancient dignity of Drumsheugh, and her audacious intrusion within its precincts.

The front of the house was lit up with lights stationary in ordinarily obscured windows, or flitting up and down staircases, showing that something out of the common had happened,

and that the whole household was roused and restless.

At the moment when the clatter of Balcairnie's horse's hoofs might be heard, the hall-door was suddenly thrown open, showing what, by contrast with the darkness without, looked a blaze of light within. A group of servants was in the glare, but still more prominently in front of them stood the Lady in her black mode gown, tippet, and mittens, with her lace lappets fluttering in the night-wind as they framed a high-nosed, high-browed face—the face of a born ruler.

Peggy set her teeth to keep back a scream of dismay, while Balcairnie lept down quickly and lifted his companion, ready to fall in a heap on the ground, from his horse.

Was the Lady come out to kill her on the spot by telling her Drumsheugh was gone, and there was no longer a place for his poor Peggy

in the house that had ceased with his passing breath to be his dwelling? When it came to that, Peggy thought in her despair, there was no place for her on the face of that earth where her young lover walked no longer.

Was the Lady come out to spurn Peggy in the sight of the powdered flunkeys and flouting waiting-maids, and still-maids for whom Peggy, cotter lass as she was, had been wont, in her greater independence and simpler sufficiency for her few needs, to entertain a mild, somewhat inconsequent scorn? At the same time, in her perturbation, she indulged in extravagant hyperbole, for there was only one miserable flunkey—guiltless of powder, who was also coachman and gardener, and one ancient waiting-maid, who united the offices of abigail and housekeeper, at Drumsheugh.

As Peggy's tottering feet touched the ground a firm foot stepped up to her, a steady

hand was laid upon her to hold her up, a voice addressed her in clear, unfaltering accents, which, though they were imperious, were far from unkind. ‘Come away, my dear. Come in where it is your right to be in your man’s house and by your man’s side. If I had been told, for certain, four months since what I’ve been told to-day, you should not have waited and been kept so long out of your own. Fie!’ exclaimed the lady in a little heat, bending her brows, ‘it was not fit that Drumsheugh’s wife should shaw neeps and sell yarn, whatever might be free to his Joe. But we’ll say no more of that. I ken it was not you who were the most to blame, my bonnie Peggy. It was all the fault of these two foolish loons, Drumsheugh and Balcairn. But we cannot wyte the one, can we? when he is lying sick and sorry, and we may come to forgive the second in time, for the service he has rendered us this night. Cheer up,

Peggy, the doctor says Jamie will pull through, and be as braw a man as ever yet.' ¹

¹ The author cannot refrain from recording that the magnanimous reception which the Lady of Drumsheugh is represented as according to her son's low-born, privately married wife, was, in fact, given in similar circumstances by the widow and mother of an old Fife laird to her son's sorely daunted, humble bride. A very different fate was hers from that of the Portuguese Inez and the German Agnes. The sagacious Scotch mother, finding that the losing game was about to be taken out of her hands, by what she did not hesitate to regard as an interposition of Providence in the illness of the laird, made her concession frankly and handsomely. Stout Drumsheugh and Balcairnie and bonnie Peggy are more than mere shadows, as the reader could not fail to see but for what is lacking in the skill of their chronicler.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LONG DAYS THAT FOLLOWED

DRUMSHEUGH recovered gradually from the consequences of his fall ; but he had a long and dangerous illness, during which there was much to subdue any human being to whom he was first and dearest.

Peggy proved herself a harmless, guileless, fond and faithful creature. She was meek in her exaltation, which, to begin with, consisted mainly of the liberty to nurse day and night a young man who had been too much spoilt by rude health, an active life, and the getting of his own way, though it had not necessarily been a base—not even a mean and heartless

way—to come out strong as a patient, considerate invalid.

The old lady opened her eyes more and more to the truth, and did not repent of her wise generosity. She was won so far as to take Peggy into a degree of favour on her own account. Still, there could not fail to be an amount of reaction here also. Mrs. Ramsay made the best of Peggy: she brought herself to think that the laird's mother might be the most suitable person to train the laird's wife and to mould her in the course of years into the future Lady as well as mistress of Drumsheugh. She, the present Lady, might do it and get over the contact with all Peggy's innumerable rusticities and gaucheries, not merely out of unselfish regard for her son, but because of some grains of tenderness already springing up, whether she would or not, in her by no means unmotherly heart, for her daughter. Poor little Peggy Hedderwick that

was, had been thrust on an undesirable eminence, which brought her in unsuitable rivalry—not with one alone, but with every former aggrieved Lady of Drumsheugh; yet Peggy deferred so sincerely to Mrs. Ramsay in the smallest particular, and looked up to her from such a lowly depth of respect that was almost awe, and of gratitude which in its intensity was well-nigh anguish, that the worst part of the offence became cancelled.

But when all was said and done, it galled and fretted Mrs. Ramsay's proud, punctilious nature to see Peggy scared and ashamed, floundering and bungling hugely and grotesquely whenever she could not avoid taking the place which had been vacated to her. For the old lady did nothing by halves. The head of the dinner-table, the central seat on the principal settee in the drawing-room, the top of the front gallery 'bucht' in Craigtire Kirk, the front seat of that coach which Balcairnie had not caused

to be driven to the Cotton to bring Peggy home, the ordering of the servants, the receiving of the guests—all belonged now to Peggy's duties and privileges. She might discharge them very unworthily, but she might not refuse to accept them ; and no third person who had Peggy's interest at heart might decline them for her or appropriate them in order to save her from suffering. This was not to be done for young Mrs. Ramsay's own sake, to avoid injuring her fatally, since if any rash, short-sighted person were to interfere and adopt this course, worse would be sure to come of it, and for the sake of shielding her present the poor young woman's future would be irretrievably ruined.

No, as Peggy had brewed she must drink—as she had aspired, and by what would universally be held a wonderful stroke of good fortune, gained her aspirations, she must consent to rise to them, and fit herself for a new

sphere. She must learn to live up to the blue china of a hundred years ago. She must agree to learn the lessons of her womanhood, with whatever toil and torture ; she must struggle upwards against overwhelming obstacles and crushing defeats ; she must resign in exchange for her dearly bought success, all the peace, ease, and happy equality of her hardest day's work as a labouring woman.

There were others besides Peggy who had to endure mental pain when Drumsheugh was sufficiently recovered to quit the retirement of his rooms and appear even in the small publicity of family life. At first, though the news had gone abroad at once, as the Lady had intended it should, since the marriage was confessed and could never be controverted, that Peggy Hedderwick had been acknowledged in the presence of the household of Drumsheugh, and received by the mother of the laird, as Jamie Ramsay's wife, there were few witnesses

of the cotter's girl's lack of qualifications for her dignities. Only the doctor and the minister and Drumsheugh's confidant, Balcairnie, besides Mrs. Ramsay and Peggy, and the elder servants, entered the sick room. These spectators were bound in honour to keep their own counsel on the subject of Peggy's mistakes and eccentricities.

Besides, when a man lies hovering between life and that death which ends all social distinctions, grades and rank, with their different standards and clashing practices, dwindle into vagueness and unreality. Love may be as strong as death, and so capable of doing battle with the last enemy; but there is a tendency, even in the noblest antecedents, the best breeding, and the most polished manners, to collapse before the primitive foe with his rude directness of dealing. It hardly signified in these circumstances whether Peggy were a laird's or a hind's daughter, though it did matter still that

she was Drumsheugh's first and last love, that it was to her his eye turned in every wrestle with the assailant, that her voice could soothe or rouse him when not even his mother's tones could penetrate through the turmoil of unaccustomed torture, fever, and weakness under which his senses were reeling.

But everything became different when the first stage was over, and Drumsheugh had returned in a state of convalescence to the family sitting-room, with no further trace of having lingered on the brink of the grave than was to be found in that peculiar unreasonable 'fractiousness' or crossness, which in itself caused Peggy to shed salt tears half a dozen times a day, as if she had been the most to be pitied instead of the most to be envied of low-born lasses. The fact was she was incurably gentle and tender-hearted, and had neither the wit to understand nor the spirit to withstand what was merely a passing trouble not worth

the reckoning, the natural result of the previous disaster, for which the victim, in his inexperience, was not altogether to blame. Not that Peggy found fault with her laird. It was simply over her own presumption and demerits, and because she could no longer 'please him,' that she grew periodically hopeless.

The servants felt the seal set on their powers of observation, criticism and ridicule—and here and there their secret spitefulness, so far withdrawn. Other spies began to drop in : neighbours who, under the plea of inquiring for Drumsheugh, came to take a look and a laugh at bonnie Peggy on her promotion. When they were formally introduced to her as young Mrs. Ramsay they would, in their own minds and in the same breath, praise Drumsheugh's taste for beauty, and censure his want of sense and worldly wisdom in committing so gross a *mésalliance*. They would seriously debate with themselves whether it would be

fit for their wives and daughters to call on Peggy, and make her acquaintance as one of themselves, till the lass could bear herself more like a gentlewoman and less like a field-worker. The old lady had taken care to have Peggy dressed as became her new station; but of what use was it when Peggy huddled away her hands in her black silk apron, just as she had hidden them in her linen 'brat,' and bobbed a curtsey, 'looting' till she caught her foot in her train, tearing the lace from her skirt, and threatening to come down with violence on her own drawing-room floor.

No, the Lady could not stand the first tug of the social struggle, above all as Drumsheugh had been ordered away from home to avoid the cold spring winds till his chest should be stronger. He was actually going to take a voyage either to Gibraltar or Madeira—great expeditions in those days—promising such adventures and risks of being chased and

taken prisoner by foreign privateers, that it quite raised the laird's spirits to think of them.

Nobody proposed that Peggy should accompany her husband. It would have doubled the considerable expense of the journey, while the laird was but a poor man for his station. Besides, to tell the truth, Peggy, with all her sweetness and humility, would have been of very little use, rather a good deal of an incumbrance, as a travelling companion. She had been rendered just then still more *distrain* and lost by the sudden death of her own mother, poor Luckie Hedderwick, which happened not long after Peggy had been transferred to Drumsheugh. The melancholy event overwhelmed Peggy with sorrow to an extent which the laird and his mother were inclined to consider unreasonable. They did not mean to be unkind, but it was difficult for them, after their first sympathy with Peggy in her grievous shock and the solemnity of the occa-

sion had worn away, to regard the widow's death otherwise than as a release to more than herself, an opportune end to one of the most trying of the awkward complications involved in the marriage. It was still harder to be quite patient with Peggy for having so little judgment in her lamentations for my 'mither' as not to recognise the compensations in the trial, and to remain the next thing to inconsolable—letting herself get more stupid and shyer than ever in her affliction, when the sole foundation for it was the death of a 'frail,' bed-ridden woman well up in years and laden with infirmities, so that she had become betimes a burden both to herself and others. She could not have been long spared to her friends in the nature of things. Peggy could not have seen much more of her mother in the circumstances. If Luckie had not happily been taken away at a stroke, her daughter could not have been permitted to leave her husband's house

to wait upon her mother without signal incongruity and a host of serious objections. Peggy ought to be thankful that she had escaped these divided duties, and to rest content with having been a good daughter to her mother when the girl still belonged to the old woman, before Peggy had married far above her in rank, and thus raised heavy barriers between the pair. The poor soul herself had been reasonable. She had been tolerably reconciled to what was inevitable, while she had cherished the utmost pride and pleasure in her daughter's lot. Peggy had been permitted to gladden her mother's heart in this respect : she ought to remember that no woman, whether old or young, could have everything in this world.

As Peggy, with all her submission, could not see this side of the question for the present—on the contrary, kept foolishly reproaching herself and mourning her loss, it would be better on the whole that she should be left to

herself—under good guidance, however,—for a time, to recover from the blow she had received and come round to a more cheerful and becoming frame of mind. The old lady would take the opportunity of her son's going South to accompany him as far as London, from which he was to sail. She, too, would be better for a complete change of scene and interests. She would pay the second visit of her life to the English metropolis, and renew a friendship with some old Scotch families that had removed to England, the members of which she had not seen since they were all school-girls together.

The Lady would have liked to supply her place efficiently. She was really a fine woman and proved more thoughtfully careful of her son's wife in the absence of both mother and son than he showed himself. In his lightness of heart and simple philosophy he never doubted that Peggy would do quite well if she did not

weary too much for him. But he would write and tell her how strong he was growing, that he did not forget her, and would be home to her again ‘belyve.’ She, on her part, must exert herself, write and let him know all about the house and garden, the cows and the cocks and hens ; while Balcairn would look after the horses and cattle, manage the cropping, and the buying and selling in the market for him, and would keep him informed on the business of the farm which was beyond a woman’s comprehension. She must go out and recover her roses which she had lost, good lass ! in his sick-room, for he meant to return as brown as sea air and a foreign sun would tan and burn him.

Mrs. Ramsay would have fain done more for Peggy. She would have provided her with a wonderful ally. It was not that the old lady did not think of it or wish it strenuously that she made no motion in this direction. It was

because she was conscious that in her former ambition for her son and engrossment with what she had reckoned his welfare, she had wronged this ally, and so did not have it in her power to ask a great favour from the injured person.

As the next best thing, the Lady repeatedly and earnestly recommended Peggy to the good offices of Cunnings,¹ Mrs. Ramsay's old maid and housekeeper, an excellent servant, devoted to the family, honest enough to be trusted with untold gold, and having but one failing to be watched and weighed against so many virtues. True-hearted, kind Cunnings, powerful in her worth, invulnerable on every other point, was 'too fond of a drappie'—to put her weakness in the euphemistic words in which it was for the most part respectfully and tenderly veiled. She could not look on the wine when it was red, or more correctly, on whisky when it was clear and colourless as the water at a well-eye, or

¹ Scotticè for Cunningham.

just tinged with the suspicion of amber which belongs to a mountain stream flowing over a bed of peat, without danger of forgetting her obligations and falling lamentably from her honourable reputation.

But except on rare and unhappy occasions, Mrs. Ramsay's strong hand had always been able to keep Cunnings from stumbling into the snare. And the Lady argued that Peggy could take care of the keys of the cellar and side-board if she could do nothing else, and that having been solemnly warned of Cunnings' weakness, she would not be so silly and unprincipled as to expose her servant to temptation. Poor fallible Cunnings, on her part, was incapable, in spite of the flaw in her perfect integrity, of laying snares to induce Peggy to leave the keys about, or abandon them altogether.

Mrs. Ramsay then provided Peggy with a maid of her own ; a sort of humble companion,

to lighten the tedium when she should be left alone, and to prevent her seeking undesirable associates elsewhere. The person selected was a distant cousin of Peggy's, five or six years older, who had been in good service, and knew and could teach young Mrs. Ramsay many things of which she was profoundly ignorant. In this way Jenny Hedderwick would break the fallow ground of Peggy's mind and pave the way for the Lady's more thorough and farther-reaching cultivation of the soil.

It may sound strange to the modern reader that any relative of Peggy's should be received as a domestic at Drumsheugh. But such arrangements, of doubtful propriety as they seem to us, were not at all uncommon in those single-hearted, downright days, when the world accepted a situation frankly and made the best of it all round. In the case of *més alliances* like the laird's and sudden elevations in rank like Peggy's, far nearer and less well en-

dowed relatives than Jenny were often received as a matter of course into the household that they might profit in their degree and in their turn by the promotion of one of their kindred. A mother would come as a nurse or a cook, a brother as a groom or a gamekeeper, to the establishment, over which another member of the family ruled as master or mistress. The arrangement could not have worked very smoothly one would think. There must have been rough and tough tugs and hitches; but there were inequalities everywhere, and the seamy side was then unhesitatingly exposed in all circumstances. The one advantage which we have lost, was still in full force; defects and obligations were freely acknowledged, not scrupulously concealed, while plain speaking flourished to an extent which we can hardly conceive in these self-conscious and artificial days. Even Cunnings, old and attached retainer as she was, with a grave defect in her

character which ought to have taught her humility, treated Mrs. Ramsay, senior, to her unvarnished opinion on many points in a manner that would not be ventured on or suffered in the case of our polished, accomplished servants—who are also far removed from us.

Indeed, another relative of Peggy's, with immeasurably smaller qualifications than Jenny could boast, had already been put on the Drumsheugh staff. Peggy had a second cousin, called Johnnie Fuggie, or Foggo, who was a jobbing gardener by trade. The old gardener, coachman, and general serving-man at Drumsheugh had become fairly superannuated and incapable even of the pretence of performing his duties. Whereupon Johnnie, a foolish, conceited fellow of mature years, not hindered by any modest doubt of his abilities, or deterred by the least delicate consideration for the difficulties of Peggy's position, applied for the honourable post, and actually urged as a strong title to

it the fact of his relationship to the young Lady of Drumsheugh. ‘The laird can never ha’e the face to refuse me the place, when he has marriet my ain uncle’s dochter’s dochter. It would be a fell thing if young Mistress Ramsay were not to haud out a helping hand and lend a lift to her ain flesh and blude. Wha but her cuzin should be her gairner and fut-man and a’? Wha will care for Drumsheugh gairden and the coach and my Leddy hersel as he will? Sowl! man, he has his ain share in them, and pride in them, because o’ the kinship!’

Thus boldly urged by Johnnie Fuggie and his emissaries, who had easily procured access to her, Peggy had made her first ignorant, humble petition to her easy-minded, good-natured husband, who answered without thinking twice on the subject, ‘Oh, aye, Peggy, if you like. The place is promised to no other that I know of. Let Johnnie succeed to poor

old Robbie Red-Lugs, but bid him mind the cauliflowers and codlins, and the horses' knees, or I'll break his head for him the first time I'm across the door.'

The Lady was not so content with this hasty appointment, which had been none of her contriving, but she thought if it did not work well, it could be summarily set aside when she and her son came back.

So Peggy was left—not in solitary state, but doubly fenced with kindred at Drumsheugh after the deplorable day when she hung on her husband's neck at parting, and saw him and his mother drive away down the fir-tree avenue, with the most miserable forebodings that she would never see Jamie Ramsay in the flesh again.

CHAPTER V.

THE REIGN OF MISRULE.

APART from Peggy's despair at the separation from her husband, following so close on the death of her mother, the young wife felt as pleased as she could feel that she was to have her cousin Jenny for her helper and counsellor. Peggy had always looked up to Jenny, putting her under a different classification from that bestowed on ordinary servants. Peggy knew how clever and diligent her older, better-instructed kinswoman had proved herself. It had been entirely by her own laudable exertions that she had attained a higher standing, from which she had always been reasonably

condescending and indulgent to her little cousin.

The tables were turned now, but it never entered Peggy's head to be anything save highly gratified that she could be of use to Jenny, while Peggy was grateful in proportion for the services which she was sure Jenny would render her. Jenny, who had lived as an upper servant among ladies, would show Peggy how to behave like a lady, so that she might no longer annoy the laird and affront his mother. And Jenny would speak to the poor, yearning, mourning girl's hungry heart of the mother whose name had come to be a forbidden word at Drumsheugh, long before Peggy had left off wearing her first crape. Luckie Hedderwick's memory must be cherished in a measure by Jenny also, since she had known the widow well, and had even been indebted to her in her better days.

Jenny was quite of Peggy's opinion that

she ought to profit by her cousin's good fortune. But there the thoughts of the kinswomen diverged widely, and ran in two distinct and opposing channels. Jenny Hedderwick was a calculating, unscrupulous young woman, bent on making her own—and that as quickly as might be—out of Peggy's advantages, and of what Johnnie Fuggie had confidently reckoned, in more senses than one, her relations' share in them. Johnnie was a forward fool, as obtuse as he was intrusive, but Jenny was worse. She had viewed what was to her Peggy's utterly unwarrantable exaltation with indignant amazement and disgust, while she had at the same time endeavoured to swallow her jealous vexation, and reap all the benefit she could gain from her cousin's prosperity without paying any heed to what Peggy might lose in the process.

Jenny did not go the length of hating Peggy, or even of bearing her decided ill-will.

She was not worth it in Jenny's estimation. She was a silly 'coof,' who, if one lost sight of her fair face, had not a single claim to rise above her old allies, and was as totally unfitted to do so as a girl could be. All the use she was for, in Jenny's sharp, mocking estimate, was to serve as available prey for those who had spirit and wit to spoil the new-made lady.

In accomplishing her object Jenny would not dream of being harsh or cruel to young Mrs. Ramsay. She would be as good to Peggy in a half-jeering, contemptuous manner as the girl would permit. Jenny was too astute a schemer as well as too reasonable a mortal for the opposite course of conduct. Indeed, hers was not a harsh or cruel nature, though she was wholly worldly and in many respects unfeeling.

At the same time, Jenny would not take the trouble or undergo the personal mortification of keeping up much of a disguise before

Peggy—her own cousin, who had been wont to convoy Jenny and carry her bundle for her in the elder woman's earlier visits to the Cotton, when Peggy had felt amply rewarded for her trudge and toil by an old riband of Jenny's or a handful of the 'sweeties' which had been her last 'market fare'—a silly lass, who could not hold up her head in her own house, fill the place she had won, give orders and exact obedience and deference from a laird himself, as Jenny would have done with a high hand in Peggy's place. But Peggy must 'pinge' like a senseless bairn for the poor old mother well out of the way. Who was to stand on ceremony and put herself about to maintain a great show of appearances before such an unmitigated goose?

Accordingly, the very day after the setting out of Drumsheugh and his mother, Jenny—a strapping-enough figure, with a foxy head and steely eyes—proceeded to 'rake' through the

house, up and down, backwards and forwards, opening cupboards and turning out the contents of drawers; taking an inventory, as it were, of what might be useful to her, with an eye to future raids.

Peggy came upon her cousin standing on a chair, narrowly inspecting the articles of dress put away on the shelves of Mrs. Ramsay's wardrobe, to which the prowler had found access by means of a key on the bunch which she carried with her ready for action.

‘Eh, Jenny, ye mauna meddle there, nor touch a preen in this room,’ cried Peggy, in the utmost dismay. ‘There’s naething o’ mine there, it’s a’ Mrs. Ramsay’s; this is her room.’

‘Hoot, Peggy,’ said Jenny lightly, in no manner discomposed. ‘Div ye no ken yet a’ the rooms here are yours, and it is only by your will and pleasure that the auld flytin’ wife gets house-room now at Drumsheugh?’

Peggy was in greater distress than before. 'But, Jenny, you're sair mista'en; Mrs. Ramsay is Drumsheugh's leddy-mither. She has the best title to be here, and she is nae randy. She has behaved as I could never have looked for her to behave, as no common woman would have acted. She neither flat nor grat, but took me in as her dochter without a word against it, though we had deceived her—Drumsheugh and me; and she has been gude to me, and patient wi' me. Oh, Jenny, surely I never said a word to the contrary.'

'I daresay no,' said Jenny carelessly; 'she's your gude-mither—you're bund to keep her up ahint her back, whatever you may do to her face. But that need not hinder you from taking a look at her gear when you have the chance. It will be a' yours in the end, for she has no other bairn save Jamie Ramsay, unless the body play you an ill trick, and put it past you in her wull, which is the mair reason that

ye should mak' yoursel' acquent wi' what there is for her to leave ahint her.'

'No, no, Jenny,' protested Peggy, wringing her hands; 'come down off that chair. I dinna want to ken what that press hauds so long as it is no mine but hers—Mrs. Ramsay's, to do what she likes wi'.'

Jenny paid no heed to the prohibition. 'Look, Peggy,' she said, pulling out and throwing down a long, lace scarf, so that it fell over Peggy's head and shoulders, 'see how you'll set that. I'm thinking you'll wear that, or something like it, when you come out o' your shell and gang wi' your laird to grand parties.'

But Peggy was not to be betrayed through her vanity. She snatched off the scarf and began to fold it up quickly with trembling fingers. She knit her smooth brows into the semblance of a frown, and set down her foot with a desperate stamp, as an outraged worm will turn on a wanton aggressor. 'Do you hear

me speaking to you, Jenny? Put back Mrs. Ramsay's things this minute? Let them alane, or I'll ring for her maid Cunnings.'

Jenny leapt down instantly and cleverly took the first and worst word of accusation: 'What do you mean, Peggy Ramsay? Am I a thief, think ye, that ye should ca' in Cunnings or ony other woman to catch me for taking a look about me when I was brocht here to look after you, madam, and see to your belongings, and put you on the richt road to behaving like ane o' the gentles? I can tell you it will be a long time before you do that, Peggy, my woman, when you begin by wyting your ain mither's kith and kin for a cantrip, because you have said the word and you are my leddy now, and are not to be contered. Had I ever the name of being licht-fingered, Peggy Ramsay, when I had whole charge of a hantle grander braws than I'm like to see at Drumsheugh? What ill was I doing to the leddy's claes by

just giving them a bit turn and air and proper fauld up, which is beyond Cunnings's power now that she is ower stiff to mount upon a chair? Has it crossed your mind what folk would think and say gin you ca'ed in ony o' your servants—*your servants*—Peggy Ramsay, to stop your cuzin from looking over Mrs. Ramsay's wardrobe? Do you want to brand me as a thief, mèm?'

‘Oh! Jenny, Jenny, how can you say sic words!’ cried Peggy, in an agony, willing to fling herself at her cousin's feet, and beg her pardon a dozen times. ‘You ken that I ken you're as honest as mysel'. I never dreamt of evening you to sic sin and shame. It would be insulting mysel' and my mither and a', as well as you! I niver, niver meant sic a wrang!’

‘Weel, then, Peggy, you'll better take care what you say, and think twice afore you speak again,’ said Jenny, not so much wrathfully as

in delivering the calm warning of a deeply-injured woman. 'I like you, Peggy, for auld lang syne, and I'll do my best for you in spite o' what has happened. But, I'm just flesh and blude after a', and though you ha'e marriet a laird you maunna try to ride roch shod ower my head, and bleck my gude name!'

'Jenny, do you still believe I would?' implored the weeping Peggy, but with an accent of indignant reproach in the pleading, which told Jenny she had gone far enough.

'Na, I hardly think it,' Jenny said with a return to reassuring, patronising kindness. 'But you're a young lassie and you're uplifted a bit, nae doubt. Your best friend's advice to you would be to take tent, and ca' canny, and dinna lippen to your ain first thochts, till you're aulder and wiser and less likely to be mista'en.'

Jenny came off the undoubted conqueror in the preliminary sparring, though she showed

some wariness in pursuing her victory. She did not again enter old Mrs. Ramsay's private domain and rummage among her personal possessions before Peggy. Jenny confined herself to what was the common ground of the laird and Peggy.

Cunnings was the next person who interfered with Jenny in her little arrangements. 'Ye maunna shift the ornaments in the rooms,' the old servant said with stolid impassiveness, which might have meant anything or nothing to Jenny, whom she caught abstracting an agate patch-box and a pair of silver lazy tongs from the drawing-room—and a gold and tortoise-shell snuff-box, and a shagreen case which might have suited a pair of Moses Primrose's gross of green spectacles, from the dining-room. 'Mair by token that flowered pelerine which I heard you borrow from young Mrs. Ramsay that you micht wear it at a friend's house in Craigie, was sent down by smack frae Lon'on

as a gift from the laird to his leddy. It is not my place to interfere wi' ony favour young Mrs. Ramsay may chuse to grant, but I will tak' it upon me as an auld servant, weel acquent wi' the ways of the family, to say that the laird may no tak' it weel from her to bestow his gift, even in the licht o' a len' on anither woman. I'll also say as a frien' to baith, that whatever may have been fitting eneuch aince on a time, in the niffer o' bunches o' ribands and strings o' beads and sic worthless troke o' lasses when you were equals, the fine pelerine, noo shuitable for Drumsheugh's leddy, is hardly the wear for a young woman even in upper service like you or me, Jenny Hedderwick.'

Jenny snuffed the air with her upturned nose, and her eyes shot out an ominous flash, but she thanked Cunnings with the greatest apparent friendliness and respect. She had taken the accurate measure of the older

woman in her strength and weakness, for such natures as Jenny's seldom fail to gauge the flaws of their neighbours. Accordingly in the week following this incident, Jenny betrayed symptoms of falling into an ailing state of health, languished, and stood clearly in need of the ale-saps and bread-berry, the white wine, whey possets, and warm drinks for which Peggy, in her anxiety and affection, furnished abundant materials ; while Cunnings prepared the food and drink for the threatened invalid, disinterestedly to begin with.

There are various curious old legends and traditions of all countries and ages—travesties, like the swallowing of the pomegranate seeds by Proserpine—of the sacred record of the eating of the apple in Paradise—which illustrate the danger of tasting forbidden fruit. If a man or woman who hesitates is apt to be lost, the weak individual who prees and prees as Rab and Allan preed the famous peck o'

maut which Willie brewed, till nothing of the peck remains, is still more likely to become the victim of a fatal appetite. Within a month poor old Cunnings had fallen lower before her mortal enemy, and disgraced herself more irretrievably than she had done in the whole course of her long service. She had been so helpless in her degradation that she could not 'bite a finger' in the customary phrase, though why the wretched sinner should seek to accomplish such a useless performance in the circumstances has not been explained. She had been seen in this state, and had been put to bed, the guilty woman, like an innocent baby, by one of the more compassionate of the mocking under-servants, to whom Cunnings ought to have served as an example while she ruled over them. She knew it all—the extent of her transgression, the shame of it, the degree to which she had exposed herself. She was down in the mire, and did not believe she

could ever rise again and free herself from its defilement, while her infatuated base propensity was tempting her to lie and wallow in the dirt, so that she could gratify the horrible craving. She shrank from poor Peggy, who, in place of challenging and denouncing her housekeeper, was fit to break her heart over Cunnings's lamentable breakdown.

Cunnings was terrified to meet her old mistress. She became the bond-slave of Jenny Hedderwick, who had led the older woman into temptation and was now prepared to feed her vice, so that it might serve Jenny's evil ends.

There never was so thorough a moral ruin effected in so short a time. The truth is that a man liable to Cunnings's sin might have indulged in it, succumbed so far, and still have continued true to the trust reposed in him and to one half of his better antecedents. He might have escaped a complete collapse,

and saved his integrity and honour. But it is a well-known melancholy instance of psychological difference between men and women that, whereas there remains a reservation and some power of resistance, even of retaining a few of the finer traits of character in the drunken man, in the case of the woman, in whom reason is weaker and passion stronger, an indulgence in an excess of intoxicating drink is prone to open the flood-gates to all corruption, and to produce a complete demoralisation of the individual.

There was no further hope or help for Peggy from Cunnings.

Jenny, triumphing in an unhallowed victory over all obstacles, sought to get Peggy too in her power, as she had got Cunnings. And Peggy had no defence from Jenny's wily stratagems and bold, fierce assaults, except God's grace and her own good intentions. She was not wise, but she had grown up pious and

dutiful, faithful and tender of conscience as of heart. It remained to be seen whether God and goodness alone would suffice to protect Peggy from Jenny, the flesh, and the devil—all the evil influences to which her husband's thoughtlessness and Mrs. Ramsay's mistake had given her over.

Balcairnie could not interfere or come to Peggy's rescue, though he was in a position to be soon aware of the mischief which was going on. Balcairnie was, to a great extent, gagged, if not tongue-tied. He was not one of those impulsive, inconsiderate male-friends who figure in so many stories, and by way of helping the women, for whom the men are supposed to have some regard, rush rashly into the breach, indulge in a great deal of foolish Platonic philandering, and precipitate the wrong they have been solicitous to avert. The Scotch yeoman was a man of another sort. He possessed straightforward honesty and common

sense approaching to sagacity in his slowness and solidity of intellect. He was further endowed with some of the delicacy of feeling and action in which those fine gentlemen of fiction are often curiously deficient. He knew perfectly well that it was not in his honorary office of farm-manager to go much about the young Lady of Drumsheugh and attempt to control her in her domestic concerns. To do so would be to draw down upon both the strongly-flavoured gossip of the country side. It would be to take a liberty which not even his intimacy with his laird could freely warrant, and which Drumsheugh, easy-going as he was, might very possibly resent. In that case Balcairnie would have played beautifully into Jenny Hedderwick's hands.

No, he was aware from the beginning that he must stand at a distance, and only come forward if matters went utterly amiss so as to forebode a grand catastrophe.

CHAPTER VI.

‘LADY PEGGY.’

JENNY made use of Johnnie Fuggie and employed him in her aim. Her motive here was twofold. Johnnie was a person interested in Peggy's kindred making their own out of Peggy, since she had become a powerful woman with favours in her right hand. It was better for all concerned that there should be a safe understanding rather than a dangerous feud between the rival claimants for young Mrs. Ramsay's bounties. In other respects Johnnie himself was a despicable object to Jenny—a crouse, claverling carle, up in years, with a silly wife and family keeping him down. But

Johnnie's relations were not all detrimental. He had a spruce, pushing nephew, who had risen to be a commercial traveller for 'a big Edinburgh house in the drapery line.' This nephew was considerably younger than Jenny, therefore flattered by her notice, while the disparity in years did not prevent her from making sheep's eyes at him.

The double inducement caused Jenny to be particularly attentive to Johnnie Fuggie, who was even more taken in by her graciousness than his nephew had yet proved himself. If the innocent man had known it, she wished that Johnnie should be art and part in her manoeuvres and aggressions. Her clever tactics were to compromise everybody all round, and when each person was deeply involved, to rule the roast, and play her own winning game by means of her accomplices.

One afternoon, in the end of April, when the weather was unusually warm for a Scotch

spring, so that the gooseberry bushes were covered with their pale green blossom, and there was a fine sprinkling of red and lilac 'spinks' (polyanthuses) and white daisies already brightening the garden borders, Jenny came coolly into the dining-room at Drumsheugh, followed slowly by Johnnie Fuggie in his corduroys, velveteen jacket, and woollen comforter, which he wore summer and winter.

Johnnie had the grace to pause, glance ruefully at his earth-laden feet, and even execute half a scrape of a bow on the threshold. He was a small, rickety-looking man, with a slight halt in his gait—more perceptible in his fatigue. He was not wont to be troubled with scruples, still he hung back a little.

But Jenny explained his presence there volubly. 'It's Johnnie, cuzin Peggy,' she said, with a wave of the hand to the unanswerable proposition and unnecessary introduction. 'He has been a' the way to the

Knockruddery planting for pea-sticks, and has carriet them hame, the gomerel, on his back instead of ordering a cart from the offices, though Balcairnie could not ha'e said strae to that. Johnnie, puir chap, is clean forfochten, as ye may see, with the long walk and the load; sae, as he would ha'e needed to gang round by the Cotton to slocken his drouth, I ha'e just brocht him in here to eat his fower hours, but ceremony wi' you and me. I ha'e telled Cunnings in the by-going, and gin you'll send her the keys, she'll bring in the Hollands and yale wi' the dishes o' tea, which are no for a man's refreshment. Sit ye doon, Johnnie, my man; dinna be blate, rest ye, and mak yoursel' at hame in the muckle chair in your ain cuzin's hoose.'

He was her own cousin, once or twice removed, and Peggy would willingly have given him of her best for his rest and refreshment; but Johnny Fuggie in Drumsheugh's absence in

the laird's chair at his table, was what she could not authorise, whether or not she had strength of mind to forbid it. She stood up, trembling from head to foot, growing very pale, and gasping for breath.

Johnnie took pity upon her. The girl's tremor still farther abashed instead of emboldening him. It reached even through his coarse and thick skin.

'Na, Jenny, ye're wrang, lass, this time,' he mumbled. 'This is no' the place for me. I couldna be comfortable, ony mair than ither folk could be. Gude e'en to you, young Mistress Ramsay, mem, I give you a' your titles wi' a' my heart. I'll gang my ways and you'll forgie this mischanter. It is a' the wyte o' this sorry Jenny. She means weel, but her frien'liness runs awa' wi' her at times.'

'You'll no gang out o' this house without tasting for the house's ain credit, Johnnie

Fuggie ; no' sae lang as I'm to the fore and under its roof, though I suld ha'e to set up a bottle and a kebbock wi' a fardel o' cakes on my ain account, as I have never needed to do yet,' protested Jenny clamorously. 'Na, I'll tell you what,' with the ready adaptation of her scheme to circumstances which is the gift of first-rate conspirators, and is for that matter an attribute of genius, 'we'll sally but to Cunnings's room, if the dining-room flegs you, and I'm sure Peggy will not refuse to grace us wi' her presence.'

Poor Peggy caught at the compromise, overlooking the sneer scarcely hidden under Jenny's accommodating suggestion. She would cheerfully bear her relations company in the housekeeper's room for half-an-hour, if that would keep them out of Drumsheugh's dining-room or the Lady's drawing-room.

Peggy little guessed that the visit was destined to be often repeated, till it became almost

a daily occurrence, brought about, as it was, by Jenny's determined, deliberate design, Johnnie's sloth and folly, Cunnings's desperate self-indulgence, and Peggy's humility and incapacity.

But Peggy was only a troubled, frightened spectatress of those feasts, which were rapidly degenerating into orgies where Johnnie and Cunnings were concerned. Jenny herself was as sober a woman from inclination and policy as Peggy was in her innocence and purity. Many women of grosser nature, in Peggy's position—raised suddenly from penury and frugality to what is to them luxury and lavish abundance, without work to do, destitute of any faculty for such duties as the women have to perform, without the smallest capacity for the poorest kind of intellectual recreation—sink piteously and repulsively into gulfs of gluttony and excess. But Peggy was secure from such hideous pitfalls—on which Jenny

may have counted, by Providence, Peggy's goodness, and the refinement which belonged, to be sure, to the core, and not to the surface of her nature.

It was the season for Johnnie Fuggie's nephew making his spring rounds in the way of business, and Jenny was strongly bent at once on gratifying and benefiting him, and on raising herself in his estimation by proving the terms she was on at Drumsheugh. She persuaded Peggy that it would only be doing her duty and being barely hospitable if she invited young Baldie Fuggie to spend a quiet evening at the house, during which he might let them see his 'swatches,' or patterns, and young Mrs. Ramsay might have the opportunity and pleasure of giving him a handsome order, for old acquaintance and kinship's sake, since Drumsheugh did not stint his wife either in house-money or pocket-money.

Peggy in her simplicity was rather pleased

that she had one relation on her side of the house in so good a way as Baldie Fuggie, who wore a cloth coat, and could handle his knife and fork, and was almost a gentleman. He might rise to be 'a merchant' in his own person. He might sit down even now at the same table with Balcairnie and the laird, though his tone was not just like theirs, and he was not altogether without the traces of the pit whence he had been dug. Yes ; she was glad to be able to grant Jenny's request on Jenny's account too.

Peggy was ready to welcome Baldie Fuggie to a supper at Drumsheugh, and she would be proud to give him a lady-like commission. She must have a braw new gown in glad anticipation of Drumsheugh's home-coming safe and sound. Her laird must see her at her best, so that all his admiration might revive, and he might fall in love with his wife afresh.

There are some people to whom to vouch-

safe an inch is to grant a yard, in whatever request is pending—people who, if they are permitted to insert a finger in an opening will forthwith introduce the whole hand and break down every impediment to their will. This was true of Jenny and the family supper to which Baldie Fuggie was to be bidden. First, Johnnie must come also, because he was Baldie's uncle and nearest surviving relation. Next, Johnnie's wife and children could not be left out, and after them Baldie had one or two other friends with whom he had been much more intimate, among the shopkeepers, sewing-girls, and maid-servants of Craigue—honest lads and lasses well-known to Jenny—and Peggy also in the days when she was not mistress of Drumsheugh. It could do no harm to have them for once up at the house to see that their old friend had not forgotten them and wished them well. She could take leave of them, for that matter, in this handsome, informal manner.

Then the gathering might be in Cunning's room, and it might be called Cunning's and Jenny's little party, merely permitted and countenanced by young Mrs. Ramsay. Thus no reasonable person could find fault with 'the bit ploy.' Peggy was led on, half unconscious how far she was going, with dust thrown into her eyes at every reluctant step. But for any preparation she had received and permission she had given, she was not the less overwhelmed and aghast at the size and style of the entertainment when it burst fully upon her in the hour of its celebration. It was far too late then to stop the details—supposing the mistress of Drumsheugh had possessed the strength of mind and the mother-wit to issue an interdict and organise on the spur of the moment something very different.

Jenny had actually bespoken a fiddler. Before Peggy could believe her eyes that Tam Lauder, the young gauger, had taken it upon

him to bring his fiddle in its green bag, there were reels forming on the floor, and she could not refuse to let herself be 'lifted' (led to the top of the set) to take the first turn, lest folk should say she was proud and held herself above dancing in the same rounds with her old friends, she who had been born and bred a cotter lass, and had footed it blithely with the laird and Balcairnie at many a maiden! Oh! how far removed from this those dances had been, when she had lived free from responsibility, and her grandest title had been 'Bonnie Peggy.'

It goes without saying that Peggy had no heart for that unsuitable, inopportune merry-making when her laird was far away and her mother's grave had not grown green. Bitter self-reproach for what she had been powerless to prevent, with aversion to the ill-timed gaiety and dismay of what might come of it, wrung her gentle spirit. Notwithstanding,

Peggy was swept on with the current and compelled to take a part in the fun which grew fast and furious, and was maintained far into the small hours, while Baldie Fuggie betrayed that his small amount of polish was but skin-deep.

Peggy escaped at last from what had become a homely edition of the situation of the lady in the Masque of 'Comus,' crying, 'Oh, mind, I'm a marriet woman, I'm the laird's Leddy,' to shut herself up in her room, sink scared and remorseful on the first seat, stare with tightly-clasped hands at one of Drumsheugh's three-cornered hats which she had kept fondly hanging on the most available peg behind the door, and finally begin to sob and cry her heart out. Cunnings had been removed in a state of insensibility from her presidency over the festivities, and Jenny was leading a troop of skirling women racing over the house, pursued with loud shouts by Baldie Fuggie

and his fellows, who did not pretend to Baldie's scraping of veneer, bent on extorting forfeits of kisses and inflicting the penalty of rubbing rough beards on blowsy cheeks.

The report of Peggy's party—it was never called Jenny's, not to say Cunning's—spread far and wide, and created as lively a sensation in select circles as if it had been the inauguration of a county Almacks. In the days and places where hardly anybody read a line of anything, save of the newspaper on one day a week and of the Bible on the Sabbath, local gossip counted for a great deal. Without it conversation would have languished, and men and women's minds become stagnant. Every scrap of gossip was therefore carefully collected and made much of. Peggy's party was reckoned very racy and droll gossip, essentially characteristic and not without its moral. It proved a great boon and set off half a dozen teas and three dinner-parties among the neighbours.

Fine doings at Drumsheugh, but no more than what was to be expected. See what came of low marriages. Time the laird were home, whether to reap the fruits of his folly, or to stave off a worse catastrophe, if that were possible. Poor old Mrs. Ramsay, who had held her head high, and had hardly reckoned a young lady in the country-side a fit match for her son. But pride comes before a fall.

It was at this time that the mocking title of 'Lady Peggy' was first bestowed on the interloper, the heroine of all these good stories. For Jenny Hedderwick and Cunnings were beneath these worthy people's notice, and little mention was made of either delinquent in the arraignment of their victim.

Though Jenny had to some extent achieved her purpose, and it might have been said that nobody resisted her will, she began to bear a greater grudge against Peggy, and to go near

to treating her with a purely vindictive malice, strangely unreasoning, in so reasonable a woman. This was not merely because Jenny had taken advantage of Peggy in every way, and wronged her to the utmost of Jenny's power, though that is generally a fertile enough source of ill-will in the wrongdoer, but because Peggy beyond a certain point remained invulnerable. Jenny had a secret resentful conviction that while apparently successful, she was really foiled in her chief object of dragging down her cousin below Jenny's own level, and so obtaining a firm, permanent hold on the poor girl through her errors and fears.

Jenny lost her prudence and her temper with it. She proceeded to cast aside the semblance of kindness which she had kept up and even felt for Peggy. Jenny now treated Peggy with positive rudeness and insolence. She was for ever jeering at the young wife

because of her unfitness for her position, her ignorance, and her mistakes. And Jenny taunted Peggy on the tenderest point, dwelling on Drumsheugh's protracted absence, broadly hinting that he, and all belonging to him, were mortally ashamed of the low-born intruder in their ranks. Was there not a cousin of the laird's who had spent most of her early girlhood at Drumsheugh, and who was now on a visit to the doctor's wife in Craigie, in the immediate neighbourhood? But though Miss Ramsay did not think it beneath her to come and stay for weeks with an old schoolfellow who had only married a country doctor, did she ever dream of walking out to Drumsheugh nowadays, to hear tell how the laird was getting on, and to make the acquaintance of her new cousin? Mrs. Forsyth, Miss Ramsay's friend and hostess, could not advise her to the condescension—not even though Drumsheugh was a good patient of Dr. Forsyth's,

and Peggy herself was acquainted with the doctor.

Lady Peggy was crushed and heart-broken in her helplessness and her miserable sense of culpability, though she was hardly accountable for her faults as a matron. She found no resource in reading, though good books would have been a strengthening and sustaining influence; while Peggy, as a carefully instructed Scotch child, had been fond of her book—a little rustic scholar, and the taste would have remained with any food for its sustenance. But when we learn in ‘Lord Campbell’s Life’ that the library even of a well-born, classically cultivated divine consisted of some odd volumes of the ‘Spectator,’ two volumes of ‘Tom Jones,’ and the ‘History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless,’ some idea may be formed of the dearth of profane literature at Drumsheugh. The stock of books had not increased since the reign of the second George,

and was scarcely a whit better than Peggy might have found in her mother's cottage room. Certainly Luckie Hedderwick had not owned a cookery-book or a work on farriery, which would have been in a measure supererogatory, seeing that she possessed few and simple materials for cookery, and had no horses to keep in health. But she had thumbed, well-preserved copies of the 'Death of Abel' and 'Blind Harry' to match 'The Cloud of Witnesses'—this branch of the Ramsays having been on the Whig and Covenanting side in politics and religion—and 'Allan Ramsay's Songs,' in a much more tattered condition, at Drumsheugh.

Peggy's sole earthly stays consisted in the faithful reading of the little pocket Bible which had descended to her from her mother, and the somewhat rigid observance of the sabbath and unfailing attendance at the kirk in which she had been brought up, to which she clung, and

from which neither fraud nor force on Jenny's part could detach her. The minister was Peggy's old friend, the Dominie, who took an interest in her, and had always a kind word and glance for her when they met, though in the ordinarily dreamy, absorbed life of a book-worm, he never guessed she was again in circumstances well-nigh as perilous as those from which he had helped to deliver her. But, however rambling and incoherent his prayers, or dry and doctrinal his sermons, they were always solemn, holy words delivered by God's commissioned messenger to Peggy. They served as balm to the wounded spirit, and bracing to the unnerved will, they saved her from despair. Yet Peggy was fast losing all modest satisfaction in her front seat in the 'laft,' all womanly pride in her appearance and surroundings. Disengaging herself with difficulty, and almost running away to get to the kirk, walking there in all states of the weather

rather than provoke discussion by summoning Johnny Fuggie to drive her, Peggy would reach her destination with disordered, shabby, black dress, ill-arranged head-gear, shoes almost as cumbered with the soil as ever were Johnny Fuggie's on working days—a poor, hunted, forlorn-looking waif of a laird's lady. The sight would disturb Balcairnie in his worship. 'If I had thocht she would be left like this—what for doesna Drumsheugh come hame and look after her?' He would enter silent, broken, indignant protests. 'But the laird, puir fally, canna help himsel';' the loyal yeoman would correct his assumption, 'and puir Peggy was ay a saft, silly quean to let hersel' be put upon.'

The late spring was waning into early summer; the budding roses were replacing the withering lilies alike in Drumsheugh and Balcairnie gardens, and still the laird tarried abroad, though the news was always of his

amendment, while every day Peggy was drifting into more heavy-hearted helplessness on her own account and a falser report in the mouths of her neighbours

CHAPTER VII.

‘HUNTINGTOWER.’

PRIMROSE RAMSAY bore a Christian name which was not altogether uncommon among the Scotchwomen of her era. It was also the surname of the excellent vicar of Wakefield and of a noble Scotch family, and the ordinary title of the sweetest and most welcome of spring flowers. She was, as Jenny Hedderwick had reported, on a friendly visit to young Mrs. Forsyth, the doctor's wife in Craigie. Primrose was not like her namesake and emblem, strictly fair to see, but she was cheery as ever was pinched daisy in February, promising to close the gloomy winter and herald the glad summer. She was

a little, pale, somewhat meagre girl, whom a passer-by might have stigmatised as insignificant-looking. Her spirit, sense, and kindness, and not her face, constituted her fortune, and it was only when mind and heart took possession of her slight, though wiry, frame, coloured her ordinarily colourless cheeks, and kindled up her grey eyes that they looked handsome. Primrose Ramsay was valued even in the matter of personal appearance exactly in proportion as she was known. Slight acquaintances thought little of her, intimate friends agreed to admire her very defects, and the old relation who had brought up the orphan girl, and with whom she usually resided, set such store upon her that Mrs. Purvis grudged Primrose out of her sight, and confidently believed her the attraction of all eyes and hearts, the greatest beauty, and the most virtuous, charming young woman in the world.

Withal, there was something about Prim-

rose Ramsay—unprotected, poor, unassuming, and kindly as she was—which prevented any one from taking liberties with her ; something which daunted the coarse and shallow, and rendered her, on occasions, as formidable as her aunt, the old Lady of Drumsheugh, could prove. Primrose won respect in her youth, and exercised influence wherever she went.

Primrose heard from Mrs. Forsyth, with a mixture of interest, amusement, and pain, all the nonsensical stories, loud ridicule, and blame, and increasingly rampant scandal afloat with regard to young Mrs. Ramsay. Primrose could not help feeling diverted, in spite of her goodness ; for she was a girl in whom the sense of humour abounded in exceptional strength, keeping pace with that ‘weeping-blood in woman’s breast,’ which made her sorry too ; because it went to her heart not to be able to go over to Drumsheugh where she had spent some of her happiest youthful holidays, or to hold

out her hand to Jamie Ramsay's wife, when Jamie was Primrose's nearest male relative, and he and she had been fast boy and girl friends. And she was sure Jamie was not half a bad fellow, though he had made a low marriage.

Primrose entertained a shrewd suspicion that the day had been when her aunt, Mrs. Ramsay, had experienced a dread lest Jamie should throw his handkerchief at her (Primrose); and so, just when the girl was growing up, had managed to put a stop to her annual visits to Drumsheugh. But in place of bearing malice or enjoying her revenge, Primrose proved, among other things, how perfectly disengaged her own juvenile feelings had been, by only laughing and shaking her head, ever so little, over the *mal à propos* recollection, and perhaps cherishing a livelier grain of curiosity respecting that bonnie Peggy who had figured as Primrose's unconscious rival.

Primrose's sole chance of catching a glimpse

of her cousin's wife, whom she did not remember having seen as the cotter lass, Peggy Hedderwick, was at Craigtire Kirk, to which the Forsyths went one afternoon on purpose to furnish their guest with the desired opportunity. Primrose felt puzzled and disappointed by the glimpse she got. Yes, young Mrs. Ramsay was very bonnie so far as features, skin, and what colour remained to her, went. But could this shabby, dowdy, almost slatternly 'disjasket' (out of joint from some depressing cause)—young woman be the lass who had caught bauld Jamie Ramsay's fancy? Primrose, notwithstanding her fine eye for beauty, had some difficulty in believing it. Poor, low-born lass! bonnie Peggy's exaltation seemed likely to end in her destruction. Poor Jamie! whose single-heartedness and recklessness had brought Drumsheugh to such a pass. But there was nothing to be done: Peggy Ramsay, according to all accounts, was developing into

a woman with whom no lady, no respectable person, would care to hold intercourse.

Primrose Ramsay improved her visit in other ways. She and Mrs. Forsyth occupied and amused themselves after the most approved standards of their class and generation. Mrs. Forsyth had put herself slightly out of the upper circles by marrying a country-town doctor. Still the simple, stay-at-home gentry were not over-particular, else they must have narrowed their set to a nearly stifling extent ; and there was a nice enough lower stratum of professional men, bankers, clergy and half-pay officers with their families in Craigie, to which the Forsyths could justly consider themselves as belonging, that at many points touched upon and merged into the lairds and their ladies' sphere. Young Mrs. Forsyth had committed no heinous solecism in marrying her doctor, and she was not punished for the small offence. She did not feel ashamed to invite

Primrose Ramsay to become the Forsyths' first guest in fulfilment of an old school-girl promise. Primrose could accept the invitation and be happy in the visit, without any further *arrière-pensée* than belonged to her stifled regret that she was thenceforth banished from Drumsheugh, which had become a prohibited place to her.

Mrs. Forsyth had acted differently from Jamie Ramsay, and the result was much more satisfactory. The single light in which the two affairs might be said to act and react on each other was that though the laird was Dr. Forsyth's patient, as Jenny Hedderwick had remarked, none looked on the unfortunate match with more disfavour, or inveighed against Peggy's delinquencies with greater contempt, than did Mrs. Forsyth. It was as if she felt bound to exonerate herself from the most distant suspicion of such gross imprudence by exaggerating the public sentiment where Drumsheugh and 'Lady Peggy' were concerned.

Mrs. Forsyth was a tall, blooming, consequential bride, to whom, at the first glance, her friend served as a foil. Dr. Forsyth was a brisk, busy, aspiring young man, well pleased with the attainment of some of his aspirations. The couple did the honours of their new home, where everything was fresh, bright, and hopeful, pleasantly to the young lady visitor Primrose. She entered with heart and soul into all their sanguine plans and projects, and so relished them in turn with her wholesome young appetite. She had her share of the marriage-parties, the teas and suppers, which were not yet over for the pair. She drove, bodkin-fashion, between the two, in the doctor's gig, without any loss to their gentility, far and near to these blithe, yet decorous, merry-makings. She could not execute half so well as the bride could a lesson in classic music on any spinnet which presented itself handily, but Primrose beat her friend hollow in playing without a

music-book tunes to which feet could keep time in carpet dances. She had her own song, which she was always asked to give after supper, and which never failed to elicit well-merited applause, for she had a sweet, tolerably trained voice, and sang with feeling and taste. Strange to say, her song was the old ballad 'Huntingtower,' and its echoes used to wake in the singer dim, contradictory associations with Jamie Ramsay and his miserable *mésalliance*.

Did the other 'Jamie' of the song go away lightly after all, and leave the peasant bride to whom, in the first brush of the affair, he gave Blair-in-Athole, Little Dunkel', St. Johnstown's Bower, and Huntingtower, and all that was his so freely, to bear the brunt of their foolish wedlock? Did the 'Jeannie' who refused so decisively the braw new gown 'wi' Valenciennes trimmed roun', lassie,' that subtle allurements to a woman's heart, and claimed only the heart

which was hers already, who with unwavering voice, though her heart-strings were cracking, bade her cruelly jesting, unfairly suspicious lover, 'gae hame' to the wife and the bairnies three he invented to torture and try her, pass in the sequel and in the natural order of things into such a wasteful, reckless, low-lived woman as Peggy Ramsay was turning out? Had true love no real foundation? Was there a canker at its core, sure to come to light in the end, even when it seemed most genuine and generous?

Primrose and Mrs. Forsyth worked and read, walked and talked together, so as to have little time to weary, even when the doctor was too much engaged to attend to them, or was sent for to some distant patient. The ladies drew, and embroidered ruffles, caps, and aprons for themselves—the favourite fancy-work of the day after work of necessity in steady, solid gown and shirt making was disposed of.

Primrose had been so far reared in intel-

lectual circles that she possessed something like a large portable library of her own, which she generally carried about with her at the foot of her father's great hair trunk; for, apart from the Bible in which she read as regularly as Peggy read in hers, it was to these other books Primrose had recourse to draw fresh springs of wisdom and happiness. She had not only 'Hannah More's Essays' and 'Dr. Gregory's Advice to his Daughter,' she had sets of 'Sir Charles Grandison' and 'Evelina.' The two novels represented all fiction to the girl, and she read in them with as inexhaustible sympathy and delight as her grandmother had found for the interminable adventures of the grand Cyrus.

During Primrose's stay in Craigie she found less need for her books than she was wont to do on a rainy day, not only because Mrs. Forsyth was no reader, but because Dr. Forsyth, being something of a naturalist, had

indulged himself in buying copies of ‘Bewick’s British Birds’ and ‘White’s Natural History of Selborne.’ These offered new treasures to Primrose Ramsay’s quickness of observation and fondness for nature.

‘Bewick’s Birds’ bore a practical result to both Mrs. Forsyth and Primrose, and had a strange collateral bearing—presumably not intended by the author—on certain future events in more than one human history. The ladies were stimulated by the inspection of the life-like engravings to a fresh enterprise for their ingenious brains and fingers—not that the device was altogether original. Feather tippets had become almost as much the fashion as muslin ruffles. But Mrs. Forsyth and Primrose would make themselves such tippets as had seldom been seen even in the wardrobes of the Duchess of Portland and Mrs. Delany. The whole country-side was to be ransacked for a variety of feathers. The doctor’s gig

was to be put in requisition to carry the collectors to different poultry yards, from which they were to beg, borrow, and, it is to be feared, when temptation waxed too strong, steal, their spoil. Mrs. Forsyth and Primrose's minds became as stuffed with feathers as if the minds had been so many beds and pillows for mortal aches and bruises. The girls, even the doctor, who did not often consent to lose sight of the superior enlightenment and dignity of his college, medical school, and learned profession, with the burden of responsibility involved in a promising practice, grew zealously engrossed and affected, as only young, eager, care-free natures could be usurped and excited by such a trifle.

‘There is Balcairnie,’ said Mrs. Forsyth one day, when the two women were earnestly speculating on the places they ought to visit in their search. ‘We have not been to Balcairnie yet. I am told that Balcairnie, in addition to

his peacock and a most splendid bubbly-jock, has got a pair of guinea-fowls. We have not a single guinea-fowl's feather, and we ought to have a whole row of them. What a good thing for us, Primrose, that Balcairnie has set up a pair of guinea-fowls. We must go a-begging to Balcairnie.'

'He is my cousin's great friend,' said Primrose meditatively. 'I remember him as a long-legged laddie running about with Jamie; but I had not much to do with him.'

'Of course not,' said Mrs. Forsyth emphatically, 'your aunt would take care of that. Your poor cousin had too much to do with his tenant—not that Balcairnie was so far beneath Drumsheugh. Balcairnie is a good farm, and they say its tenant has grown rich in these war times, though he is well liked, and has not a lowe raised among his stacks for keeping up famine prices, like some other farmers. But it was he who took about Drumsheugh to

maidens and country ploys, where he fell in with "Lady Peggy." Had it not been for her there would have been no great harm done, since young men will have their heads out and know for themselves what a splore means. Why, even Davie, though he was coming out for a doctor, which is the next thing to being a minister so far as douceness is wanted, went his round of first-footings, and feet-washings, and dergies, before he had me to take care of him,' the young wife ended, with a fine show of power and sedateness. 'But as they tell,' she began again, 'Balcairnie had gone too far himself in daundering and sitting among the stooks, and dancing with the barn-door beauty, who was as cunning as Sawtan himself in her schemes. He might have given her his promise—who knows?—in their trysts and convoys and caperings, for a wily fool never loses sight of her own interest. At last, he pushed the laird into the breach, and escaped by causing

the officer to cover the soldier, instead of the soldier the officer.'

'What a shame!' cried Primrose; and then her natural candour and sagacity came to her aid in disentangling the perversion of the story. 'If Jamie did not put Balcairnie out,' she suggested; 'that was more likely than that Drumsheugh should serve as a cat's paw to another lad.'

'Any way, Balcairnie acted as blackfoot to the laird and played him an ill turn,' maintained Mrs. Forsyth, who in the midst of her youth and happiness was not disposed to take a charitable view of human nature. Kirsty Forsyth showed herself a trifle hardened at that stage of her history.

But so blinding is covetousness—granted the object coveted is no heavier than a feather—that Balcairnie's evil deeds did not hinder Mrs. Forsyth from instigating her husband to invite the yeoman to dinner on the market-day.

This invitation was with the sole purpose of the two fair traffickers in feathers getting round the simple farmer and inducing him to have every 'pen' which fell from the guinea-fowls carefully picked up and stored on the ladies' behalf—if the greed did not prompt them to lead or drive their victim to the barbarous extremity of slaying the birds that they might then be plucked for the benefit of the tippet manufacturers. The still greater wantonness of torture by which birds have been plucked alive to serve the vanity of women had not so much as entered the heads of a more primitive generation.

Mrs. Forsyth's single scruple was on the score of comparative gentility. 'Jock Home is only the farmer of Balcairnie,' she said anxiously to her husband; and 'though Drumsheugh has thought fit to run and ride the country with him, they were two young men after their own pursuits. I do not know,

Davie, if it is right for us to have him at our table otherwise than as your patient, to bid him to meet Primrose Ramsay as though he were young Pittentullo', or Captain Don, or any other gentleman of our set.'

'Hout, Kirsty,' said the more liberal doctor, 'you have not stuck so fast to your set. Balcairnie is a fine enough fellow who would pass muster anywhere. He is well to do; I should not wonder though he were to buy his farm, if Drumsheugh let it get into the market, and come out as a laird among the best of them some day.'

So Mrs. Forsyth swallowed her misgivings and Balcairnie furnished a stalwart figure to the two o'clock dinner-table in the flat above the apothecary's shop, which also belonged to Dr. Forsyth, and was a source of considerable profit to him. Such a house was thought then quite good enough for the best doctor in Craigie, even though he had mated with a

sprig of the gentry. Their olfactory nerves were not supposed sufficiently sensitive to feel mortally offended by the occasionally pungent smell of those drugs which helped to butter the couple's bread.

Balcairnie and Primrose regarded each other in side glances, under their eyelashes, with some interest. He had heard in the inveterate distortion of facts which is a prominent feature in gossip, that the Lady had intended her niece for her son. Primrose had just been told that Balcairnie had contrived to shift his folly and its consequences to Drumsheugh's broad shoulders, though her mother-wit had cancelled the error, and laid hold of the greater probability of the yeoman's having been jilted for the laird.

The estimate which the two formed of each other at first sight differed comically and unfairly.

‘A shilpet sparrow of a lass like that!’ Bal-

cairnie reflected disdainfully, 'was she to stand in Bonnie Peggy's licht? Drumsheugh would not have had an ee in his head or a mind of his ain, if he had preferred this ledly to yon kimmer.'

'Jamie's a well-favoured, manly chield, with a good heart, though he may have a thick head,' considered Primrose, not without reluctance; 'but I doubt his Peggy stood in her own light for all that. If I am not mistaken, the yeoman is worth double the laird.' Her penetration saw at once, against her will, that Balcairnie was the bigger, better man of the two.

But by the time the party had repaired to the drawing-room, and the ladies were exerting themselves with their interested object in helping to entertain Balcairnie, a remarkable reversal of his opinion took place, while her verdict remained unchanged.

As the conversation was craftily turned to

ornithology generally, he became deeply impressed by Primrose's lively intelligence in expounding these plates in the bird-book, which so delighted him, and by her wonderful acquaintance with the looks and habits of those fowls of the air with which he himself was most familiar.

‘The leddy-lass kens as muckle about craws and doos and laverocks as I do, though I have followed the ploo, and set girns for them, when I should have thocht she would have been sitting with her feet on the fender, or at a window fanning herself, ganting over a nouvelle and holding a yapping lap-dog on her knee.’

Mrs. Forsyth made a dead set at him with the feather tippets. He looked at them, laughed with surprised pleasure, and ventured to touch them shyly with his great brown hand in a sort of marvelling, fearful, wholly large-hearted admiration. He glanced round at the tambour

frames, the open spinnet, the books which might be nouvelles, but which must be so much better reading than he had imagined when they did not incapacitate the readers for all this ability and industry, and for a practical appreciation of the bird-book. It is to be doubted that Balcairnie applied to Primrose and Mrs. Forsyth a homely, if emphatic, classification and commendation, which at the same time meant a great deal from his mouth and that of Robbie Burns'—'clever hizzies!' he said to himself. Balcairnie remembered Peggy with a rueful sense of contrast. Poor lass! she could not be half so useful now at Drumsheugh. She could not divert herself in all these charming fashions. Poor Drumsheugh had, indeed, thrown himself away. How could he have been so blind and besotted? It made an odds when a man kenned little better.

Of course, Balcairnie would be right glad to be allowed to be of any use to the ladies.

The guinea-fowls were at their service, living or dead, and he thought he could put them in the way of some moor-hens and wild ducks. If Mrs. Forsyth and her friend would not object to honour his bachelor-house by their presence, if they could put up with the poor accommodation of a farm-house, perhaps the doctor would bring them out to see what they could find at Balcairnie, where the cherries were nearly ripe and curds and cream were always to be had for the taking.

The ladies were correspondingly gratified, not only with the success of their design, but in addition with Balcairnie's somewhat quaint and naïve but altogether becoming deference and gallantry. An engagement to visit him was entered into on the spot.

All this agreeable social intercourse had nothing whatever to do with old friendship and its obligations—on the contrary. Balcairnie, as he looked and listened, more and more

enchanted by the bright face and womanly eloquence of Primrose Ramsay, in the revulsion of his feelings, was conscious of an increasing temptation to undervalue and decry Peggy's charms and Drumsheugh's taste, which the fickle man had been applauding to the skies hardly three hours before. Balcairn no longer called Primrose 'a shilpet sparrow.' Where had his eyes or his ears been when he made that invidious comparison? She was like the lady wren in her dainty proportions as she flitted here and there with such light grace, and such deftness of hand in everything she did, whether she helped Mrs. Forsyth to dispense the dishes of tea, or showed Dr. Forsyth the impressions of seals the ladies had taken in his absence, or arranged the counters on the card-table. She was like his mother's favourite white hen, which always looked so dainty and spotless beside the other hens, that discriminating people grew disgusted with their flaunting

yellow or red necks relieved against their brown or black backs. She was like the white calf, which his father had held to be so lucky. No pet lamb could have been so canty as this orphan lassie showed herself. She was an orphan lassie, though she was also a lady who had danced at the hunt balls into which Balcairnie might not intrude.

But when Primrose was farther called upon to lend her aid to the hilarity of the evening by singing for Balcairnie's benefit, and when she sang her romantic ditty of 'Huntingtower,' Balcairnie, struck by the unintentional coincidence, swayed by more than one powerful influence, and penetrated to his melted heart, took a swift and bold resolution which was neither time-serving nor personal.

CHAPTER VIII.

PEGGY'S FRIENDS.

THE woman who sang 'Huntingtower' as Primrose Ramsay sang it could neither be hard-hearted nor narrow-minded, Balcairnie said to himself, and he acted on the speech.

The visit to Balcairnie was paid. The ladies behaved as graciously as the host was intent on rendering the visit a pleasure to his guests. Everything was propitious, even to a recent fortuitous moulting of the guinea-fowls. There was quite a heap of the clear grey and black and white spotted feathers, which Primrose called 'second mourning feathers,' at their fanciers' disposal. The cherries were at their

best, the curds and cream as rich and sweet as could be desired. Yellow ragwort, small pink and white convolvuluses, great purple mallows grew among last autumn's russet stacks, which sheltered the farm-house more effectually than the fir-tree avenue sheltered the mansion of Drumsheugh. The garden was fragrant with red and white gilliflower, pink cabbage-roses and lilac lavender, and gay with orange marigolds. The kye were coming home from the pasture, the sheep were in the fauld, the pigeons were flying back to the pigeon-house as the evening drew on. The whole place looked so 'couthie' and sweet and bright, so home-like and cheery, that the women felt it hard it should be wasted on a single man and his servants. The hardship to her sex surprised Mrs. Forsyth into something like an aggrieved wonder that Balcairnie did not take a wife.

The remark in its turn startled a deeper colour into Balcairnie's ruddy cheeks, and pro-

voked a laugh from Dr. Forsyth and Primrose Ramsay.

At last Balcairnie found an opportunity when the party were still strolling about the garden, and Dr. Forsyth had called away his wife to examine one of the Dutch summer-houses which were then in great favour, and of which he proposed erecting a specimen in their garden at Craigie. Balcairnie and Primrose Ramsay were left sauntering along a broad box-edged walk, listening to a blackbird in a neighbouring lilac bush. Balcairnie interrupted the bird, and went to the gist of the matter and of his purpose at once. He had no notion of courtly fencing. Artful preambles were not in his way. ‘Miss Ramsay, I want to speak to you about your cousin’s lady up at Drumsheugh.’

Primrose met his request, which was more like a demand, with a look of surprise and some annoyance. She was not easily offended,

but she felt vexed that this man—her cousin's friend, whom she had begun to respect as well as to like—should introduce an unpalatable subject, one on which they could not be expected to agree, at his own place too. He was less of a gentleman—one of nature's gentlemen—than she had been thinking him. Then she said, with a shade of distance and dryness in her manner and tone, 'I beg your pardon, Mr. Home, but I am not acquainted with young Mrs. Ramsay, though she is my cousin's wife.'

'That is the very reason I want to speak to you about her,' he said, looking her straight in the face. 'What for are you not acquainted with Drumsheugh's wife?' he asked bluntly. 'You should be. Not only has she become your relation by marriage, you could be of the first service to her; you could do her all the gude in the world. And I have conceived such an opinion of you, madam, that I

believe you would be pleased to confer a favour even on a stranger, and do gude to one you might never see again.'

She stood still, perplexed and a little softened.

He was forced to go on; he must speak out now or be silent for ever. 'Young Mrs. Ramsay is lonesome in the laird's absence. For mair reasons than one she has great need of a friend. If I mistake not, you could be the best friend she has ever had in this world.'

'How could I?' stammered Primrose. 'She is your acquaintance, not mine. Why cannot you help her if she requires help?'

He waived aside the proposal with an impatient swing of his arm. 'A man body is worse than nothing to a woman in some straits. A woman friend—a gude woman to give gude advice from her own experience, is everything. If I were even to mint the trouble in a letter

to Drumsheugh, I might only breed more mischief. I tell you what, Miss Ramsay, you may rue it to the day of your death, if you do not give a thocht to what I'm asking from you.'

'Be reasonable, Mr. Home,' remonstrated Primrose, whom his earnestness infected and stirred with agitation. 'How can I interfere? I have no commission from my cousin Jamie or my aunt, even supposing I could move in this matter. From what I have heard—forgive me, if she is a friend of yours—I could do no good. Young Mrs. Ramsay is taking her own course—a foolish, downward course, I fear—with which it would not be fitting that I should intermeddle.'

'Then what is the gude of your being a young leddy, so muckle cleverer and wiser and better-bred, with no chance of your making a mistake or the world's finding faut with you?' Balcairnie put the question sharply, almost

sternly, and the next moment grew abashed and shocked at his own rudeness. 'I beg your pardon, humbly, Miss Ramsay, I've no manners, as I need not tell you, but it makes me mad'—with a quick groan—'to think of another woman, a leddy gude and kind, as I can see, leaving a poor sister lass to be sorned on, trodden down and driven desperate—never by her own wickedness and hardness of heart, but just because she's as tender and gentle as any leddy in the land.'

Primrose was struck by his passionate advocacy. How he must have loved this girl, who had forsaken him for a grander suitor, to be so deceived in his view of her character—if he were deceived. She had already had a conception of him as a larger-minded man than Jamie Ramsay, and his present appeal proved his largeness of heart.

'I daresay she is to be pitied, poor thing, with her man so long away, though he is

recovering,' she granted slowly and doubtfully, for even Primrose Ramsay's prejudices were strong. 'But has she not been very thoughtless, to say the least, in bringing so many of her own folk about her and letting them run riot—disturbing Drumsheugh and the neighbourhood by their pranks?' Primrose ended more severely.

'How could she help having her own folk when they were ordained, and placed about her by Drumsheugh and the auld lady? When no other body would look near her to see whether she could say her head or her feet were her ain, or speak or go but as her so-called servants would let her!' maintained Peggy's champion stoutly. 'I grant you Peggy ocht to have been firm,' he admitted, forgetting in the half-bitterness of the admission the scrupulous ceremony with which he had been previously naming his laird's lady. 'She should have stood like a rock and defied all inroads

on her dignity and authority as the new-made Leddy and mistress of Drumsheugh—as you, madam, with your birth and breeding, would have done, no doubt. But when you find a poor bit leveret behaving like the dog that chases him, or a lintie like the hawk that’s striking her down, then you may reasonably—you spak’ of reason, Miss Ramsay—count on sic behaviour from a meek, young creature like Peggy.’

‘Has she no spirit of her own?’ Primrose was goaded on to inquire.

‘I do not know what you mean by spirit,’ said Balcairn, doggedly. ‘She had enough spirit to do her mither’s bidding, and save the laird from being betrayed into becoming a scoundrel who might have ruined her and flung her to the dogs. But as for the spirit to hold her ain and keep off all that would rob and murder her, where her gudes and credit are concerned, I trow Peggy has not muckle of that spirit to

boast of. There is some word about the wind being tempered to the shorn lamb. I wuss it may blaw lown ower Peggy's grave, for, so far as I can see, the best thing she could do would be to dee soon, poor lass. Then when her head's lying among the mools, the fact that it was ever raised to be one of the heads of the house of Drumsheugh may be forgiven her, and the scum of her folk cannot prey on her any longer.'

'Oh! do not say that,' cried Primrose in real distress. 'It cannot be so bad as that. Think of Drumsheugh who has cared so much for her—what would he do?'

'I've thocht of Drumsheugh long enough, ower long; I'm going to think of Peggy now and what she's to do. It was I who brocht her hame to Drumsheugh, and I swear to you, Miss Ramsay, if I had kenned what the innocent, loving soul was coming to, I would suner the beast had fallen and broken his neck—

baith of our necks. For it is true I was Drumsheugh's aider and abettor—his blackfoot in courting Peggy Hedderwick. He was my friend and Peggy's choice ; it was not for me to conter them.'

Primrose looked in the manly, honest face, and believed every word he said, to the last syllable. Her dauntless spirit rose and her generous heart swelled. 'There is a better resource,' she said, with hearty sympathy and goodwill, relinquishing her opposition all at once, and, womanlike, passing in a bound to warm partisanship. 'She shall not be set upon like that ! How base of her kindred ! But we will circumvent them, sir. You and I will beat them before the game is played out. I'm not afraid that my cousin Jamie will be seriously angered by my interference. I'll venture to take him in my own hand. As for my aunt, she's an upright woman, Mr. Home. She would never countenance such wrong-doing.

She is ignorant of it. When she welcomed Bonnie Peggy home she meant to receive her as a daughter and behave to her as a mother should—I am sure of it.'

It was a difficult enough task which Balcairn had set Primrose Ramsay, and he could render her no assistance in the beginning. It must not even appear that she was acting on his prompting.

Mrs. Forsyth was exceedingly aggrieved by Primrose's proposing to pay a visit to Peggy, and opposed the step violently. Doctor Forsyth, who should have known better, shook his head at his wife's instigation. Primrose's happy first visit to the couple was in danger of having its harmony entirely spoilt, and the girl suspected that her friends' opinion was a tolerably sure sign of the light in which the world generally would regard her conduct. It was mean, time-serving, and unworthy of her to go near 'Lady Peggy,' and seek to get

the foolish mistress of Drumsheugh out of the mess into which she had floundered.

But Primrose was as strong and staunch in facing and overcoming difficulties in what she recognised to be a good cause as Peggy was weak and yielding. There was the courage of a lion in the small, pale, pleasant-mannered, merry-tongued girl.

Primrose walked out alone to Drumsheugh, claimed the right of entrance to the drawing-room, which could not well be denied to her, and begged young Mrs. Ramsay to be told that her cousin, Miss Ramsay, had come to wait upon her.

Peggy did not pause, like 'Mistress Jean' in the 'Laird o' Cockpen,' to ask petulantly what brought her visitor there 'at sic a like time,' for it was early in the day. She was overwhelmed with consternation and shame while Jenny coolly informed her cousin that here was one of the laird's family come to call his wife

to account, to require a statement of her stewardship, and to pounce on all her shortcomings.

‘Oh! what sall I do, Jenny? Mercy on me! what sall I do?’ besought the poor changeling in the foreign nest.

‘Say you’re no weel—I’m sure that’s true eneuch,’ suggested the temptress. ‘Say you never trysted her here, and you maun bid her excuse you for you’re no fit to receive a visitor, you’ve gotten the heartburn, or the headache, or ony other convenient ailment.’

Accordingly a message was brought to Primrose: ‘Young Mrs. Ramsay was very sorry, she was not able to see a stranger.’

But Primrose was more than a match for Jenny. The young lady had quite as much ready wit at her command as the woman owned. It would be strange if the powers of light did not sometimes overcome the powers of darkness. Primrose presented her compli-

ments, and she too was very sorry to hear that her cousin's lady was ailing. But it did not matter so much—Mrs. Ramsay need not put herself about, or exert herself when she was not fit for the exertion. She—Miss Ramsay—had walked out from Craigie with the intention of staying for a few days at her cousin's house of Drumsheugh. If its mistress was not well enough to come down to her visitor to-day, no doubt Mrs. Ramsay would be better to-morrow or the next day. In the meantime Miss Ramsay could entertain herself, and her old friend Cunnings would see that she had everything she wanted.

‘Hech, sirs! hech, sirs! sirs the day!’ moaned Peggy, shrinking away in the fastness of her chamber from the most distant sight or sound of her deliverer.

‘Send the bauld cutty about her business. Bid her leave the hoose this minute,’ stormed Jenny.

‘Oh, I canna do that, Jenny,’ insisted the cowering Peggy. ‘Drumsheugh’s leddy cousin—she maun bide here as long as she likes, till he come back, if she takes it into her head, though I wonder what pleasure it can be to her to force herself in and sit in judgment on a puir lass like me. Oh, Jamie, Jamie! will you never come back and stand by me?’

‘It’s no your chirming will bring him back. If he had wanted to come he might have been here long syne,’ said Jenny scornfully. ‘Peggy, tak your choice—either that insolent hempie maun gang, or me.’

‘Jenny, Jenny, will you leave me, when the auld leddy engaged you to stay with me till she came back?’ implored the girl, to whose transparent mind infidelity to a pledge was simply incomprehensible. ‘How can I put Drumsheugh’s cousin to the door? It would come ill aff my hand; I could look neither

him nor his mither in the face again if I were guilty of sic sauciness.'

'Then you've ta'en your choice, Peggy, my woman, and you maun abide by it,' said Jenny, beginning instantly to gather together her 'pickings' and belongings. 'It's muckle gratitude I've gotten for a' the trouble I've wared upon you. But you'll maybe think on me, madam, when you're in the hands of your gaoler. For Drumsheugh and his mither have sent you a rale gaoler at last, and it's little pity she'll ha'e on your fule tricks, you heartless gipsy.' Jenny had the wisdom to anticipate defeat, and beat a masterly retreat, while the wretched Peggy was weeping and quailing, and abjectly beseeching her tyrant to reconsider her resolution.

However, Jenny was not sufficiently prudent to avoid altogether an encounter with her adversary, in which Peggy's 'cuzin' came off second best.

‘Gude day to you, mem.’ Jenny flounced past Primrose who had gone out to stroll in the avenue. ‘I wuss you joy o’ the charge you’ve underta’en. I suld ken something o’t, and I tell you for your comfort you may as weel be a daft woman’s keeper. Peggy Ramsay is bund to gang daft as sure as ever lass gaed. I may tell you a bit o’ my mind since you’ve not stucken at treating me like a common thief.’

Primrose turned round upon Jenny with a flame of outraged righteousness in the girl’s aspect like the flaming sword which the angel held to bar the way to Paradise. ‘These words are very ready on your lips, Jenny Hedderwick. I believe they are too ready. If young Mrs. Ramsay were to lose her wits, it would be you who had scared them away. Woman, you are worse than a common thief! You have seethed a kid in its mother’s milk.’

At that terribly mysterious accusation even

Jenny looked cowed for the moment and slunk away, muttering a denial. The first news she heard when she entered Craigie was that the firm to which Baldie Fuggie was attached had broken—become bankrupt. ‘Sae that door is steekit for the present,’ Jenny said to herself without equivocation. But she had her pickings—a profitable four months’ work, in addition to her wages to console her, and for such as Jenny open doors are plentiful.

Cunnings was also stumbling and fumbling about, in trembling preparations to be gone without delay from what had been her home for forty years; but Primrose anticipated her. She came softly into the housekeeper’s room and looked shyly and sadly at the sinner. Primrose said no more than ‘Oh, Cunnings, Cunnings, I’m sorry, sorry,’ and the grey-haired delinquent groaned out her abasement: ‘Ye may weel be sorry, Miss Ramsay, for I’m a lost woman, and yet I’m no worth the sorrow

o' the like o' you. I'm just a miserable, auld drucken drab.'

' Oh ! whisht ! whisht ! Cunnings,' cried the girl, hiding her face, and thinking how the trusted servant had been proud to teach her many a secret of housekeeping, and had made much of her and petted her in the old happy days, when Primrose came between a child and a girl to Drumsheugh.

' Let me gang !' cried Cunnings desperately, ' afore the auld mistress claps her een on me again. She'll walk in neist and speer what I've dune wi' the hoose and the keys when they fell into my keeping. I've betrayed them baith, Miss Ramsay, and what's waur I've sided wi' that limb o' Sawtan Jenny in betrayin' the puir simple bairn up the stair. Mind ye she was betrayed. She would never o' hersel' had ony troke wi' sic doings as we were fain to carry on to cloak our ill deeds. I've solded my sowl for drink, and I've betrayed the young

mistress (Maister Jamie's wife). Let me gang, Miss Ramsay, if you've a thocht o' sorrow for a wicket wretch like me.'

'No, Cunnings, you shall not go,' said Primrose brave and steadfast, like a pitying guardian angel this time. 'You'll stay and help me to undo all the wrong, and then your own fall may be forgiven and forgotten. You'll trust to me and I'll protect you from your fell weakness. I'll speak to my aunt and cousin when they come back. I'll tell them that you wanted to go. I'll bear the blame of keeping you here. You were a faithful servant once; you'll be faithful again, please God. It is never too late to repent and win back respect and confidence. Cunnings, you do not need a girl like me to tell you that.'

Cunnings hung her head more and more, and wept the few scalding tears of age; but she stopped her packing and submitted to Primrose Ramsay's guidance when at the words

of sympathy and encouragement, remorse was converted into repentance.

Primrose had frequently and anxiously conned over the part she should play in her first meeting with Peggy. Miss Ramsay would approach the young mistress of Drumsheugh with studied deference and all the formal homage which was now Peggy's due.

But when Peggy, compelled to stand at bay for the second time in her life, after a hasty, ineffectual effort to arrange her dress properly and remove the traces of tears from her face, crept like a guilty culprit or a forlorn ghost into the room, Primrose forgot all her preconceived theories and studies and thought only of the fair young creature thus blighted in what should have been her pride of bloom. Instead of advancing in a stately fashion, curtseying and waiting for Peggy to offer her hand, Primrose went swiftly to the wife, clasped her in the girl's kind arms and kissed the cold cheek,

which began to blush warmly with amazement, doubting relief and trembling pleasure. ‘My cousin Peggy,’ said Primrose, in her clear, sweet voice, ‘I’m glad to know you. Will you forgive my intrusion? I’ve often heard of you and so must you have heard of me; and now we must make the hearing knowing, and become good friends as well as kinswomen, if you will let me stay as long as you can spare room for me at Drumsheugh.’

‘Stay as long as you like,’ stammered Peggy. ‘There’s no want of room. Ony o’ Drumsheugh’s frien’s maun aye be welcome here. Oh! surely you ken that, though I canna say what I should,’ beginning to twist her fingers.

‘I ken,’ said Primrose gently, ‘and you say all you should. You’re very good to me, cousin Peggy—you’ll let me call you that instead of Mrs. Ramsay, which I’ve been accustomed to say to my aunt, and you’ll call me

cousin Primrose. You are very good to permit me to stay here when I've taken you by surprise.'

'*Me* good! Permit *you*, Miss Ramsay! Oh! you're laughing at me in your condescension,' cried Peggy, aghast.

'No, I'm not laughing, and there is no condescension. I'll never laugh at you,' answered Primrose a little gravely; and then she went on cheerfully, 'When we come to know each other better, I'm sure we'll be good friends, and you'll not suspect me of laughing at you in that sense again.'

Peggy stood rebuked without being chidden, and somehow her crushed spirit rose a little under the rebuke. She began to look Primrose in the face with timid satisfaction, and to proceed to ask her to sit down and try to make her comfortable, as Peggy had been wont, in the few happy moments after her marriage, to busy herself modestly with Drumsheugh and Mrs. Ramsay.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LESSONS THAT PRIMROSE GAVE WHILE
BALCAIRNIE LOOKED ON.

EVEN Primrose, who was of a hopeful disposition, with some well-placed confidence in her social powers, had wondered what she could get to say to Peggy in the intercourse which must follow, and Peggy had been in mortal terror at the appalling necessity of making conversation for Miss Ramsay. But after the first ten minutes the talk became wonderfully easy between these two honest, single-hearted, gentle souls, though they were on different levels of intelligence and education. Peggy was entranced by what Primrose could tell of

her early visits to Drumsheugh—including innumerable anecdotes of the young laird. Why, Primrose was the first intimate friend and equal—like a sister of Drumsheugh's—whom Peggy had ever known, who could and would give the loving girl—pining for talk of Drumsheugh in his absence—welcome, though not very recent information concerning him. Primrose, in her turn, enjoyed drawing forth Peggy's tales of her school days, when she had been the little class-fellow of both Drumsheugh and Balcairnie.

Gradually and almost inadvertently Peggy passed in her talk from her school to her home and her mother. When she would have stopped, abashed, recollecting with tingling cheeks and a pang at her heart that her husband and his mother had not cared for her recalling these tender associations, she found, to her deep, ineffaceable gratitude, that it was otherwise with Primrose Ramsay. 'Tell me

about your mother, Peggy ; I like to hear about mothers—I think all the more because I have not been so favoured as you. I never knew my mother ; she died when I was a child in arms. But your talk helps me to judge what my mother would have been like—is like. For our mothers are both alive, and we'll see them yet in Heaven.'

Primrose introduced a new *régime* at Drumsheugh—a reign of order and diligence, peace and prosperity. And in place of its being opposed by Peggy or proving distasteful to her, it was hailed and clung to by her with breathless, well-nigh pathetic eagerness. She was so desirous, when the least prospect of attainment was held out to her, of being a good wife, a mistress of Drumsheugh of whom its old owners need not be altogether ashamed.

One of Primrose's first questions had been whether or not Johnny Fuggie should be sent away after Jenny. If necessary, Primrose

would assume the responsibility of the dismissal, and save Peggy from every grain of the pain of it. But after consultation with Balcairn, and on examination for herself, when the righteous young reformer found that the man had only been a tool in Jenny's hands, like poor Cunnings, that he had got a wholesome warning, and was capable of being induced to behave with fitting respect and keep at a discreet distance from his mistress—especially when it was taken into account that he had a wife and family whom it would go to Peggy's heart to punish through their bread-winner—Primrose agreed that Johnnie should remain on trial, so to speak. The trial, as in the case of Cunnings, ended well. Johnnie, in spite of his temporary aberration, his long tongue, and his foolish conceit, behaved thenceforth very tolerably under difficulties. If Peggy and he occasionally lapsed into too rash, free-and-easy gossip when she happened to be alone with

him in the garden, it was probably as much her fault as his, and it might serve for a safety-valve in the tension of their relations. Though poor Peggy would flutter off like a lapwing when surprised in the indulgence, no serious harm followed, and Drumsheugh was the last man in the world to come down heavily on so natural and venial an offence.

Peggy, as a rule, showed herself very docile and a very quick pupil. She only displayed a little restiveness now and then, when the lessons trenched too closely on much-prized associations.

Primrose said one day, ‘You have very bonnie hair, Peggy, but I think I could let you see how to dress it better, so that your friends might more easily guess how long, and fine, and glossy it is.’

‘This was the way Drumsheugh liked my hair busket lang syne,’ answered Peggy, a little jealously; ‘and if I were to alter it, then

it would be to put on a mutch. My mother put on a mutch when she was married; she held that all married women should wear mutches,' Peggy explained, evidently a little troubled that she had not complied with her mother's standard.

'But maybe Drumsheugh will like your hair basket in another fashion now,' said Primrose persuasively. 'His fancy may be as taken with the new as with the old way. His fondness does not rest with the past, it is to last all your lives, and it will always be finding out new beauties in his wife and her fashions. The glory of wedded love is its growth in fidelity and its fidelity in growth. It is, or should be, like God's love—new every morning, and so it never gets stawed (satiated), or tires, or shifts. As for the mutch, you can always wear it of a morning in our rank, and you may come on to something like it of an evening, if my cousin Jamie bring you, as I should not wonder

though he will, a fine lace 'head' of Mechlin or Valenciennes.'

After that conversation, under the blissful prognostication of her laird's finding new beauties in her every day, Peggy consented to learn to put up her hair like Primrose's, in a modified version of some becoming mode of the time, and thus came considerably nearer in appearance to the conventional lady of her generation. So with her clothes: Primrose taught Peggy how to choose them, and how to wear them.

Strange as it may sound, it was not otherwise with her mind; for Peggy had received the good, solid, parish education of a Scotch child a hundred years ago. Her constant study of the Bible had trained her intellect, so far as it went, as well as her heart. Her familiarity with the Hebrew prophets and poets, with old Scotch ballads, and with the exquisite songs which Burns was then causing to flood

the whole country, from castle to cottage, had cultivated her imagination and taste. Peggy entered with positive zest into the new world of literature, didactic and fanciful, to which Primrose introduced her. To the teacher's joyful surprise, and a little to her bewilderment, Peggy was far more impressed and enthralled by a book than Kirsty Forsyth had ever been. Peggy listened with the most respectful attention to the advice of Hannah More and Dr. Gregory. She hung on Richardson's and Fanny Burney's stories. She was wrapped up in the fortunes of Harriet Byron, Clementina and Evelina, though their spheres were so different, and the '*ma foi*' of Evelina's aunt, with the cockney follies of her cousins might have been Greek or Latin, or the practices of Timbuctoo to Peggy. Still she had perfect, comprehensive sympathy for each heroine. Primrose's entire heart was won by Peggy's unexpected openness to Primrose's beloved books.

Another gift of Peggy's was susceptible of training. Under Primrose's judicious direction Peggy's singing became greatly improved, and brought on a par with that of the chief young lady vocalists round Craigie. Peggy's broad Doric did not interfere in the least with this accomplishment, for she sang Scotch songs, and her mother tongue only enabled her to give them with truer effect.

Dancing was an additional available attainment of the age—so highly coveted that the acquirement was often prosecuted under what might have appeared insurmountable obstacles. The poor notable wives of impecunious lairds dispensed with expensive dancing-masters, and taught their children to dance the intricate country-dances of the day by means of chairs set up in rows.¹ Lord Campbell, after he was

¹ As an example of the rigid self-restraint, no less than the indefatigable self-devotion of one of these ladies, it is recorded that when a son was about to sail for India—a terrible exile then—and came in to say farewell, when he found her playing

a distinguished, hard-working lawyer, went under an assumed name to an evening dancing-school. Dr. Norman Macleod's aunts were supposed to have acquired dancing from an enterprising little governess, heavily weighted with a wooden leg. Primrose was bent on refining and perfecting Peggy's dancing. She would make feints of practising her own steps and of longing for a country-dance till she coaxed Peggy to stand up with her at the head of a double row of chairs.

Balcairnie, who could go oftener to Drumsheugh now that Miss Ramsay was there, caught the two girls in the middle of such a performance. Primrose with long-winded assiduity was singing the tune of 'The White Cockade,' in addition to taking her part in the dance. Peggy was slightly holding out her

on her piano, she merely looked over her shoulder, nodded a 'good-bye, my dear,' and immediately turning resumed her tune, and played on till his last footstep had sounded in the avenue.

gown as she was bidden, and sliding bashfully, yet not without a certain natural grace, down the room at the backs of the chairs. No gazer could have been more imbued with keen pleasure and humble admiration, but, like Actæon, he had to pay a penalty for his rash gazing. He was compelled by the autocrat Primrose to join in dancing a 'three-some reel,' performed to his whistling instead of her singing, while the last rays of the setting sun were yet gilding the pear-tree round the western window of the Drumsheugh drawing-room. When he was brought to the point he did his duty gallantly, not withholding a single spring, shuffle or 'hough!' which was Primrose's due, but capering his best, with the serious face which most English and Scotchmen put on to qualify their gambols. It might be some consolation for the effort of the exhibition to hear a judge and mistress of the art like Primrose say graciously after the deed was done,

‘ Well danced, sir. I have often heard that there were no reels to be seen far or near like those danced by you and Drumsheugh and my cousin Peggy here, and now, though I am a poor substitute for the laird, I know what the folk said was true.’

Peggy’s hands were far more unmanageable than her head or her heels. She had been brought up too entirely in the country, and Luckie Hedderwick had been too poor for the child to have derived any advantage from such a ‘ sewing school ’ as Craigie possessed, under the patronage of some of the Ladies Bountiful in the neighbourhood. It need hardly be said in addition that Peggy had not the smallest acquaintance with the mysteries of high cooking, preserve and pastry making, and the brewing of home-made wine. Peggy could spin and knit well, and do a little coarse sewing and darning rather indifferently. She could scour a floor or a table, make porridge

and kail, boil potatoes and bake cakes, but she could do little else in the light of domestic attainments. Unfortunately, with the exception of the spinning and knitting, even Peggy's few acquirements were out of count. The field for them was gone. Primrose set herself with affectionate zeal to supply the blank, but long before Peggy had toiled half through her first sampler, Miss Ramsay was forced to own to herself that here was labour thrown away, as much as if she had sought to train Peggy to play on the spinnet late in the day. There are some respects in which lost opportunities—however innocently and inevitably lost—can never be recalled. Peggy's fingers had grown stiff, and her eyes dull to nice distinctions of pattern and colour. She must be left to her spinning which, fortunately, was not yet banished from drawing-rooms; and she must be permitted to hem towels and dusters in the same dignified quarter. For the child-wife

Dora could not have felt prouder to be of use than was the rustic 'Lady Peggy.' Indeed, Peggy went further than Dora, since the little English girl could feel content to be played with—whether by David Copperfield or Gyp, while it made the deeper-souled Scotch girl, who had once actually been the bread-winner of a household, feel humbled and miserable to realise herself of no real moment, an idle ornament—if she could be called an ornament—and not one of the stays of her house.

At last Peggy's wifely ambition was fired to gigantic struggles by two grand and glorious achievements which were dangled before her eyes. If she would give her whole attention and try and try again, she might—who knows?—so improve in white seam and cookery as to be fit before she died, or her sight and memory failed, to make a frilled shirt for Drumsheugh, and bake a pie which he could eat.

How hard Peggy strove at her tasks, with such splendid rewards before her, during the long summer days! So immeasurable was her enthusiasm that against tremendous odds she attained her object, even before Drumsheugh's return. She made the shirt, every bit with her own slow hands :

Seam, gusset, and band ;
Band, gusset, and seam ;

sewing on the buttons in an intensely happy dream. She baked a preparatory pie, pondering as anxiously over its ingredients as the eastern princess debated over her crucial cream tart with the pepper seasoning, and more impartial authorities than Primrose and Cunnings would have pronounced the feats highly creditable to their author.

With innocent pride and exultation Peggy displayed the trophies of her prowess to Balcairnie. She showed the sark of Hollands fine, solemnly assuring him that she had put in

every 'steek' herself, and gleefully boasting that she had a web of the same cloth bleaching on the green, and by the next summer she would have made a dozen of shirts to keep the laird well provided. She conducted her friend the yeoman into the larder, and invited him to break off a lump of the pie-crust and 'pree' it for himself.

Having examined these two credentials of capable womanhood, which used to be demanded from every young girl before she passed into a young lady, that were often crowned by gratified parents with such substantial gifts as silk gowns or gold watches, he said with profound conviction, and the utmost approval: 'Ay, Mrs. Ramsay, you're a finished leddy now, and you may thank Miss Ramsay for it.' He made a little obeisance to Primrose in his turn, and looked as if he felt certain that Peggy's prosperous future was thenceforth secured.

Primrose had grown very proud as well as fond of her pupil, after the visitor had by earnest representations induced the old relative with whom she usually dwelt, to grant her further leave of absence and suffer her stay at Drumsheugh to extend to many weeks.

It happened to be Primrose's first long visit from home after she was quite grown up. Therefore it formed an era in the girl's life which might never be repeated. This was not foreboding an early death for Primrose, but she was no longer a school girl, and before travelling had been made easy, when it was still both hazardous to the person and a drain on the purse, friendly visits were not frequent though they might be long. Primrose and Peggy had laughed together over that famous marriage visit paid by the 'heartsome lass,' Miss Suff Johnstone, to the young matron the Countess of Balcarres, which lasted over a period of thirteen years. 'I should like to give her safe

out of my own hands, improved as she is, the dear lamb, into the hands of my cousin Jamie and my aunt,' Primrose proposed to herself. 'I wonder what they will think of her; if they will thank me. But I have done little; I had such good ground to work upon.'

The Ramsays, mother and son, had heard of Primrose's presence at Drumsheugh, and were thoroughly acquiescent and complacent, though not in equal degrees. The laird was simply well pleased that Peggy should have good company, be acknowledged by his kin, and become acquainted with one of the best of them. It was left for his mother to cry out: 'Primrose Ramsay at Drumsheugh! That beats all! Now all will go well with my son's wife.'

To do the old lady justice, she had been accustoming herself more and more to think and speak of Peggy as 'my son's wife'; while she did so, she took the girl nearer to her

heart, and made Peggy's joys and sorrows more her own. 'I would have given ten years of my dowager's jointure to have said before to Primrose, "Come and help us," but I had not the face. Primrose Ramsay is a fine as well as a clever creature.' Mrs. Ramsay reflected further: 'Who but she would have looked over all former shortcomings and been the first to hold out her hand to Peggy? I see now what a wife Primrose would have made to Jamie, but it was not to be.'

No doubt the fatalistic sentence had been to a considerable extent worked out by the speaker. For it had been on the cards that Jamie Ramsay might have been won from Peggy in the earlier stages of their acquaintance, and his allegiance transferred to Primrose, if that most winning young woman—at once strong and sweet—had continued thrown in his way as a visitor at Drumsheugh.

Still, Mrs. Ramsay, though rather an ex-

ceptionally truthful woman, consoled herself by repeating, with a shake of the head, 'It was not to be,' slurring over all the details in the failure of such a marriage, and adding briskly, 'But the next best thing is for Primrose to have taken Mrs. Jamie in hand.'

So long as Drumsheugh and his mother used the privilege of rare travellers in prolonging their travels, Miss Ramsay had to content herself with showing off Peggy in the first blush of her rapid improvement to Balcairnie. Generous man though he was, he sometimes sighed in the middle of his unaffected satisfaction—not so much for Peggy as for that charmed region into which she was fast passing, and which he might never enter. No fairy princess or gifted woman, however good, would quit her rank to train his clumsy hands and feet and tongue, to refine his plain manners and rude tastes.

But other company besides Balcairnie now

came freely to Drumsheugh. Primrose's presence there made the greatest difference in this respect to Peggy. If the laird's cousin—a sensible, well-conducted, well-educated, young lady like Miss Ramsay, went and stayed with his wife, the scandals against her must have been grossly exaggerated. She must have been more sinned against than sinning: Miss Ramsay had taken care to remedy all that was wrong, and if she supported 'Lady Peggy' thus cordially, Drumsheugh's neighbours could do no less than back her a little, for the sake of the laird and his mother.

When people did notice young Mrs. Ramsay, everybody was struck by the change in her, and the immense advance she had made. She was becoming quite presentable, and like the rest of the world. Poor young thing! after all she had always been modest and harmless, though she had been a cotter's daughter and a field worker not two years ago. Her elevation had been

the fault of Drumsheugh and Balcairnie, as Drumsheugh's own mother had said.

Mrs. Forsyth herself made her appearance at Drumsheugh, acknowledging by her presence there some glimmering suspicion that a fresh mild sun might be about to rise on the social horizon. 'You have worked wonders,' she said to her old friend. 'I believe I could bid young Mrs. Ramsay to my house to tea now, without fear of how she might behave and what folk would say. Still, it was a great risk, and I cannot acquit you of much imprudence in exposing yourself to it.'

'I am not so foolish as to ask your acquittal, Kirsty,' said Primrose, 'and we are not out of the wood yet. Take care that you do not run into danger yourself. My cousin Peggy might help herself and drain your tea-pot.' Primrose was provoked into a hit at the private parsimony which was already the weak point of Kirsty Forsyth's housekeeping 'Do you know

what Mrs. Jamie said to me when we were speaking the other night of the dancing-school ball at Craigie, and I was remarking that if Drumsheugh had been at home we might all have graced it? "I might have tried a reel or even a country dance," she ventured to promise, "but a high dance I would not have attempted." Yet, if it had not been going out of fashion, so that she might have danced it at the wrong time and place, seeing that she does not know all the outs and ins of society, poor dearie, I would have engaged to instruct her to walk through a *minuet de la cour* ravishingly.'

'Primrose, you are out of your mind or fey,' said Mrs. Forsyth angrily, for to dance a *minuet de la cour* ravishingly had been till quite lately the height of polite accomplishments.

Primrose was not always in a merry mood. Like most fine characters, hers had a pensive

side, which it remained for Peggy to find out. 'Why do you take so much trouble with me, cousin Primrose?' inquired the young wife in one of her paroxysms of gratitude.

'Because I like you so well, my lassie,' answered Primrose promptly. 'I'm real fond of you—as fond as though you had been the sister I never possessed, and that is saying something. I would have liked a brother—a big, blustering, fleeching chield of a brother—to order me about and make a stir in the house. But oh! Peggy, I would fain have had a sister. I would have had a great work either with an elder or a younger sister.'

'But when you first kenned me?' urged Peggy.

'Well, you see, I could not let you be wronged, as Balcairnie told me you were wronged, and my cousin Jamie is the nearest man-body I have. Some day he or his son, if you bring him an heir, will walk at the

head of my coffin as chief mourner at my funeral.'

'Na, na,' interposed Peggy; 'you'll marry yoursel'—you're bound to; and a man and bairns of your ain will lament you sair. But death and auld age are far awa'.'

'I dinna ken,' said Primrose softly; 'we do not all live to grow old, Peggy; my mother and father both died young. As for marrying,' speaking a little more lightly, 'we do not all marry either. I'm not bonnie, like you, and I've no tocher.'

'What a tocher you would be to any lucky lad who had the gude fortune to win you!' cried Peggy ecstatically.

'But he cannot ken that ere he set his heart on me,' said Primrose naïvely. Then she went on to tell Peggy that the income of the elderly relative with whom Primrose stayed died with the annuitant. Primrose might be a very poor gentlewoman indeed, in a generation

when there were few channels by which a gentlewoman could earn independence. She was often forced to think how anxiously she would have to pinch and scrape to secure a living in her old age, when she was 'a single leddy,' without even the small privilege of 'a lass with a lantern,' for her evening escort to the houses of better provided friends.

While Peggy vowed in her heart that Primrose should never know such straits, since the best seat, the best room, and the most precious thing which Drumsheugh held must be at her command, young Mrs. Ramsay was made to understand that the sense of her loneliness, her lack of family ties, and her uncertain future often pressed heavily on Primrose. Yet this was the girl Peggy had always envied, because Primrose was so clever and helpful and blithe that she never entered a household without becoming quickly like sunshine there. It

taught Peggy another, and that one of the most valuable, lessons she learned from her friend—the mingled warp and woof of which the web of human life is composed, the hard knots beneath the smooth surface.

CHAPTER X.

‘A’ WILL BE RICHT AGAIN WHEN JAMIE HE’S
COME BACK.’

AT last, when the late harvest of those days was nearly over, when Balcairnie was ‘grieving,’ or ‘leading,’ or ‘forking’ in the fields and in the stack-yards both of Balcairnie and Drumsheugh, before the first hoar frost had melted in the early rays of the morning sun, till it was lying again thick and white all around, like the manna of the children of Israel, in the moonlight; when the mellow russet and yellow apples had long replaced the delicate pink-and-white apple blóssom, and there were no lingering flowers in the gardens save sun-flowers, mari-

golds, and daisies, Drumsheugh and his mother were to come home—not ‘late, late in the gloamin,’ like Kilmeny, but at a more rational hour of the afternoon. It would permit a four o’clock tea, or ‘fower hours,’ something perfectly distinct from a modern kettledrum. At the ‘fower hours’ Peggy’s famous pie was to serve as the *pièce de résistance*, well balanced by ale and glenlivat. Her maiden efforts in preserves, elderflower and elderberry, currant, and ginger wines were to keep company with the butter-bannocks and cakes and honey, the loaf-bread, the short-bread and the diet-loaf which suited the old lady’s green tea. The provision was not too ample for the large execution sanguinely expected from the ravenous appetites of the travellers. Balcairnie, too, had donned his best coat in honour of the occasion, hurrying from the harvest-field at the first word of warning that a yellow post-chaise was seen on the road to Drumsheugh.

It had not been altogether the laird's careless procrastination, or any reluctance to return home from a growing fear of what he was to find there, which had delayed the mother and son so long. There had been chases by privateers, contrary winds, an illness of Mrs. Ramsay's, an accident to the London coach, uncontrollable impediments turning up in succession and baffling the travellers.

But at last Peggy wore, under happy auspices, one of the new gowns which had been ordered from Baldie Fuggie. It had been carefully cut out, made up, and toned down under Primrose's superintendence; next it had been brightened up by dexterous touches here and there, of lawn neckerchief and apron, and bonnie breast-knot. It was a very fair and gentle-looking young lady, whose trim feet in their rosetted shoes, under the dainty skirt well tucked through the pocket-hole, tripped so lightly—though the speed was tremulous, from

her post by the decapitated stone pillars at the head of the fir avenue, into the middle of the rough road—along which she had jogged with Balcairnie on the wintry night of her dismal home-coming—to take that first place at the chaise door to which she was entitled.

Old Mrs. Ramsay's head, well protected with wraps, though it still wanted a month to Martinmas, was poked out of the window on her side in anticipation of her arrival. 'Eh! can that be you, Peggy, my love?' she cried with glad surprise. 'You're looking so well I would hardly have known you.'

But when Drumsheugh leapt from the chaise and took his wife in his arms, he said the very reverse, though he had not even heard his mother's comment, and had no thought of contradicting her. 'I'm glad to find my Peggy the same,' he said fervently, 'the very same as when I left her. I'm far gladder of that than to be at hame again, though that is good, too.'

I have not seen any leddy like you, Peggy, my doo, since I quitted Drumsheugh.'

Peggy looked uplifted to the sky as at the very words she would have liked best to hear.

'The ungrateful man !' said Primrose Ramsay to Balcairnie, when the two were comparing notes together in the recess of one of the drawing-room windows before he left. 'The ungrateful woman !' after all I have done to make her liker him and her place henceforth.'

He was not sure whether she was most in jest or earnest, and there was a strain of wistfulness in his reply. 'But did you not see how his speech pleased her, Miss Ramsay? She would rather have been told she was the same to him than that she had grown like the queen on the throne ; yet she would not have been the same to him if she had not changed with the weeks and months, thanks to you. Do you hear me, madam, or do you suppose I'm contradicting myself? He has been learn-

ing, almost without his knowledge, to see her with other een all the time he has been away, and if she had come upon him, just as she used to be, he would have been startled and flegged. It is these other een which the improvement in her fits so well, that he was as proud and happy as a king to see at a glance she was as bonnie and dear to him as ever. Except for you, Miss Ramsay, this gude end would never have come to pass.'

'I'm afraid you're a flatterer, Balcairnie,' said Primrose demurely.

'Na, na,' he said hastily, with some trouble and agitation laying hold of him, in consequence of her accusation, 'I have no saft words. I'm but a yeoman-farmer. Nobody's likely to ettle to rub me down—or up,' he finished, a little sorely.

'Don't let them, if there is anybody so conceited and impertinent as to try,' she said quickly, with a curious tone of half-smothered

indignation against him rather than against herself, mingling with her half fun; 'there is no call for it. You are best as you are; you could not be better. But why do you let me speak like that? Why do you need to be told such a plain truth?'

A rush of colour flew into his face, a glow into his eyes; still he paused doubtfully, as at news too good to be believed. 'Forgive me for being a gowk,' he said humbly, 'but do you really mean I could not be better to you, Miss Ramsay?'

She bit her lips, frowned, laughed, and nodded, while she grew as red as fire herself. 'Why do you make me say and do such things?' she repeated, with an impatient tap of her foot.

'Well,' he said eagerly, 'I've gear enough, and if I were to buy a place like this, and be a laird like Drumsheugh, you and me would never be equal in anything worth counting—

never. Nobody kens that better than myself; but there would be less outward odds, less descent in the sight of the world for you.'

'Please yourself. I daresay it is very natural for a man to wish to have land of his own,' she said, with the indulgent sympathy which was one of her chief charms. 'Most natural for a man like you who would know and love every inch of his land, and spend his life in causing it to wave with corn. But if you please, I have my pride too, and I think I would rather stoop a little in outward show, if the world likes to call it stooping, than that you should be in a hurry to rax up (stretch violently) an idle fancy, to me. I would like fine to try what it is to be the gudewife of Balcairn. I've a notion it would be a pleasant place to fill, to stand in your mither's shoes, and be to you what she was to her gude man.'

In after years, when Primrose had long

been the much-loved, much-honoured wife of Jock Home, and their love had room and to spare for merry jesting, he was wont to assure their daughters that he would never have presumed to approach their mother as a suitor if she had not given him the first word of encouragement.

On the whole, Balcairnie and Primrose's *mésalliance*—small by comparison, though, to be sure, it was a direct result of the first flagrant transgression of social laws, met with large tolerance. There were even persons, only slightly acquainted with the future bride, certainly, who maintained she had done very well for herself—‘a penniless lass with a long pedigree,’ white-faced, and small to boot, who had won so braw a bridegroom and so comfortable a down-sitting as Balcairnie. She had cut her own cloth when she was pretending to be looking after the intercasts of others. Even the old Lady of Drumsheugh grieved over the marriage

principally because she was conscious that here too she had been to blame for the misadventure. And Primrose was so fine and generous a creature she deserved the very best match in the country, which, when it came to that, Primrose argued with spirit she had got.

As for Primrose's proper guardian, she would not have thought the Prince of Wales or the Duke of York good enough for her darling, so that it did not matter so much that Mrs. Purvis should resent the child's infatuation, and experience a large amount of chagrin, which had to be tenderly borne with and persuaded away before the wedding could take place.

Mrs. Forsyth, though she had set the example, did not clearly perceive the parallel, and was by no means without several strong private objections. Balcairnie might have plenty of money and old wheat stacks, but he was not in a learned profession like Dr. Forsyth,

and it would be a terrible upheaval of the very foundations of gentility if unequal marriages were to become common, the rule instead of the exception.

But there was great and unmixed joy in the hearts of Drumsheugh and Peggy over the delightful fortuitousness of the attachment. Drumsheugh almost shook the bridegroom elect's hand off, and loudly claimed the right to be 'blackfoot' in turn to his friend. Peggy hugged Primrose as if they had been very sisters, and cried that now she was not to lose her, she, Peggy, had little more to desire; she was near the summit of human bliss. In the end even the few hostile voices were silenced, for Balcairn, in the course of a year or two, fulfilled his purpose of buying a fair estate, was welcomed among the lairds, and held up his head modestly among them. Then the old Lady of Drumsheugh and Mrs. Forsyth took him fully to their hearts.

JEAN KINLOCH.

CHAPTER I.

JEAN SCORNE.

‘OWER the muir among the heather,’ Jean Kinloch walked straight and fast on a sunny sabbath morning in autumn. She was only nineteen years of age but already she was tall and broad-shouldered, with the perfect proportions and perfect development of health and strength. She was nearer to a beautiful woman than to a bonnie lassie. She had the dark-haired, black-browed, grey-eyed face, with the clear-cut features and clear complexion which one is accustomed to associate with the highest type of Norman beauty. But Jean’s white square teeth, and round somewhat massive

chin, were departures from the type as it is usually to be met with. And if she had the dignity and earnestness which on occasions break into sunshine—incomparably sweeter, more pathetic, even more radiant, relieved against the almost sombre background, than an all-pervading, soulless light-heartedness can be—it was not Norman dignity and earnestness. It was the self-respect and sedateness of the Scotch peasant woman, on whom a Hebrew stamp has been deeply impressed, who is enamoured of duty as other women are enamoured of pleasure, to whom the sternest doctrines of Calvinism are invested with an awful beauty. These are the Lord's decrees, and though He should slay her, yet will she trust in Him.

Jean's dress had lost the picturesqueness which would have distinguished her grandmother's, but it was good of its kind—if somewhat severe in the tone and cut, and only remarkable as worn by Jean Kinloch. But

Jean carried a bible which was no modern, cheaply printed, cheaply bound Bible Society's volume : it was a valuable hereditary possession in a couple of small volumes bound in fine and lasting russian leather with flaps fastened by burnished silver clasps, while there was dim gold on the edges of the yellow leaves with their clear delicate print. A bible not unlike it is to be seen among the relics of Burns. It was given by the peasant-farmer's son to his Highland Mary—the girl whom he was to immortalise by two out of the most exquisite love-laments in any language—in that autumn when she came down and 'shore' the harvest with him among the

'banks and braes and streams around
The Castle o' Montgomery.'

But Jean Kinloch's bible was not a love-gift, on which, as it was held in the man's left hand over a running stream, the woman and her love clasped hands, and swore in the sight of thei

God to be faithful to death. Such bibles with the broken sixpences of a more worldly form of troth-plight were already gone out of fashion. This book possessed a different distinction, having been Jean's mother's kirking bible.

Jean was bound on a long and fatiguing walk even for her youth and vigour, so that she had got up by daybreak, before even the minister, the earliest riser in the manse, had replaced the Greek and Hebrew studies of ordinary days, by the preparatory devotions peculiar to the sabbath day, while the rest of the household lay in silent unconsciousness. She had set out ere the raw mist had cleared away, in order to reach Logan Kirk in time for the forenoon 'diet of worship.'

The only sufficient warrant in Jean's eyes for such a distant expedition on that 'sawbath day' which she had been taught to reverence so intensely, would have been an exceptional privilege of sitting down at one of the sacred

‘tables,’ after they had been jealously ‘fenced.’ Then she would have heard it ‘served’ by some grand minister, a very patriarch and prophet in one, a man famed in Jean’s circle for lofty austere piety, impassioned zeal, and immense experience with learning to match, though the latter quality was held in small account compared to the recommendations which went before it. Such a minister was a fit successor to ‘Holy Renwick’ and ‘gude Cargill’ and the other heroes and martyrs who endured to the end—till they were shot down in peat bogs, or mounted steadfastly and triumphantly the long ladder to the high gallows in the Grass Market of Edinburgh.

But young Jean was not journeying on so unexceptionable and profitable an errand. It was her own private affairs which sent her forth to cross the broad moor on the sabbath morning, and any competent judge might easily guess that Jean’s affairs were in dire confusion when she took such a step.

Jean's story was not unprecedented in her rank of life, though it is to be hoped that hers was an extreme case. She had been courted for years, young as she was, and at last troth-plighted to a young ploughman. Their marriage had been fixed to take place in the following spring at Whitsunday, one of the two great feeing, flitting, and marrying terms among Scotch agricultural labourers. Jean had been making manifold happy preparations in her quiet womanly way by little purchases from pedlars, by seams sewed diligently in the half hours which were honestly hers, by plans made over and over again with fond deliberation and reiteration for the laying out of her little savings and her next half year's wages. She had been undecided whether she herself should invest in a chest of drawers, or help Bob to buy an eight-day clock, either of which would be an 'honesty,' that is a standing mark of respectability in their 'cot

house' and might descend as an heirloom to their children.

In the meantime the bridegroom elect had left Dalroy, which was his native parish as well as Jean's, and gone 'to better himself' on a farm in the parish of Logan. But it did not seem to her to matter much—except where their feelings were concerned, that he should have little communication with her, either personally or by letter in the interval. He might or he might not, after the pitting of the potatoes, the last pressing job of the rural year,

tak his stick into his hand

on his sabbath-day out, and cross ten miles of moor, as Jean was doing now, to visit her for a few hours. He might or he might not send her a formal letter or two, or a message occasionally by the carrier. What was his performance or failure in such trifles to Jean's great trust in her lad? Yet of all classes of men, perhaps with

the single exception of soldiers, not one is so notoriously fickle in love-making as Scotch ploughmen, not one is more exposed to special sources of temptation, and not one, alas ! as Jean knew, though her pure mind recoiled from the grievous knowledge and refused absolutely to connect it with her lover, is more apt to fall into a particular form of vice.

But it is to be hoped that the class's frequent fickleness and folly do not often attain the climax they reached here ; for Jean had not only been courted, a solemn promise of marriage had been exchanged between her and her lover, and such promises are not broken—either by lord or lout, lady or lass, without causing such a scandal in their respective worlds, as proves the comparative rarity of the offence.

Jean had dwelt in her dream of perfect faith and security until two days before the sabbath in question. Then the sister of the lover, who was also Jean's bosom friend, came

to the back door of the manse and called out Jean in the middle of the day at the height of her household work, to break to her a catastrophe.

‘Oh Jean!’ said Eppie, taking the first word—before Jean could cry out was there anything wrong with Bob—and speaking with tears and groans and honest blushes—‘Oh! that ever I should see the day I would be black ashamed of my ain kith an’ kin—that ever I should have to say it to you—a lass that mither an’ me were proud to count as ane of the family. There is word by Willie Broon the carrier—and I doubt it is ower true, for Willie, though he may take a drap, was never given to leein’—our Bob has played you fause, he has ta’en up with another lass—anee Leezbeth Red (Reid), a fellow-servant at Blawart Brae. Nae doubt she has set her cap at him ilka day and hour, ilka kye milking and horse suppering, and Bob was aye a simple chield—even mair sae when a fair flattering tongue than when red and white cheeks came

in his way. The upshot is—and I could have seen him, my ain brither, in the mools afore I had to carry the tidings to you—and I'll never speak to the other lass who has stealt him from you—never, be she ten times my gude sister—but it is richt you should ken at aince ; they say Bob has done her a sair wrang, and there is nothing left for him but to marry her ; so the twa are to be cried together this very incoming sabbath in Logan Kirk. They may be cried and marriet too,' protested the informant in her righteous indignation for Jean, 'but it's no his friends that will ever own them after sic heartless deceit, and sic disgrace as they have brocht upon us a'.'

'Dinna speak in that wild way, Eppie,' said Jean with a little of her natural stateliness and reserve after the first deadly spasm of sick incredulity and terrible pain, when Jean had held her breath for a moment. 'If it be sae that Bob has changed his mind without telling me, even if he has fallen into greater sin, still it

is not for you to refuse to own his wife ; though I ken you mean weel, what gude would that do to me? And now I maun go in, Eppie, for I am in the middle of ironing the minister's best sark, and if I tarry longer the irons will get cauld.' And the irons must not get cold though Jean's heart should break. She must go on ironing in a dazed sort of way, but yet to the best of her ability, that special sark of the minister's which he was to wear when he presided over the Synod next Tuesday.

Then Jean resolved to ascertain for herself, beyond the possibility of doubt, whether Bob Meffin were a traitor or a true man. It was not a subject to ask questions about, nor was she the woman to lay bare her heart to the public gaze. But this coming sabbath was Jean's sabbath out, and she could, without saying a word to anybody else, get her unsuspecting mistress to grant her leave to spend the day in walking across the moor and attending public worship

at Logan Kirk instead of waiting on the ministrations of her master at Dalroy.

Jean shed no tear nor did she sob and sigh audibly as she walked along to meet her destiny. But she was utterly unobservant of the nature she loved in the scene around her, either in its broad outlines or in its minute details. She had no attention to spare to-day for the spreading heathery moor, as fresh and free almost as the blue sky above it, on a sunny morning like this, when what had been the summer's glistening dew-drops were just beginning to fall heavily and hoarily in the first suspicion of frost.

Jean had no notice to give to the sweet pungent smell of the heather, to the varying hues of the purple milkwort, the yellow rock rose, the nodding white-flowered grass of Parnassus which diversified the red ling. She did not listen to the hum of the big bee—a splendid fellow in black and gold, who was continually crossing her path and sounding his

drone in her ear, or to the twitter of the brown and grey linnet which brushed her very skirts as he rose from the broom, or to the crow of the moor cock and to the cry of the plover. Yet all these noises were made doubly distinct by the sabbath stillness which rendered itself felt even on the moor when no sportsmen were shooting there, no quarrymen or bands of late shearers taking near cuts to their quarries and fields.

Now and then Jean roused herself from her painful abstraction, and tried to control her racked heart and brain, by what she had always known as the potent spell of duty. It was the sabbath day, and therefore she was not her own mistress; though it was her 'day out,' she ought not, as a Christian woman, to be engrossed with her own worldly concerns, however imperative. She should try at least to engage in some mental exercise befitting the day—since, as Jean held, its divine obligation was not

affected by her human distress. She made a great effort and prepared to repeat aloud, as she walked, one of the psalms with which her memory was stored, using it as the early Christians raised the symbol of the cross for a charm against distracting worldly thoughts.

She began mechanically to say the first psalm, the earliest learnt by Scotch children, one of the most familiar throughout life. But

All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice,

in its call to universal praise—associated closely as it is with the noblest, simplest, most moving melody which ever rang rudely yet thrillingly through barn kirk or along bleak hill-side, faltered and died away on Jean's quivering lips.

The staunch-hearted woman began again with the psalm which holds the second place in the regard of her nation—

The Lord's my shepherd,
I'll not want;

and when she had reached the fourth verse, she found that her choice was more appropriate :

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear none ill,

said Jean steadfastly—and truly, it was like voluntarily descending into 'death's dark vale' to go on with the end in view for which Jean journeyed this day. And if she had got her choice, the girl in her magnificent bloom of young womanhood, with all her warm interest in life—which her religion sanctified but did not stifle, would far rather have lain her down and died, than found Bob Meffin a leear, a still more cruel sinner against another woman than against Jean herself.

Jean was not well known to the congregation of Logan Kirk ; she had not been there more than once or twice in her life before, and the one person in the neighbourhood with whom she was well acquainted she did not expect to see in the kirk this morning.

She reached the little kirk close to the adjoining hamlet, both of the ‘drystane dyke’ order of architecture, just as the most primitive of bells commenced to make discord instead of harmony, clattering and tinkling instead of clashing and booming its summons.

Nobody recognised Jean as she passed through the groups in the roughly kept kirk-yard, and though she did not absolutely shrink from observation, being too brave and upright to take, as if by natural instinct, to hiding her head, she certainly did not desire notice. She was glad to get into a back seat without attracting any further remark—than what was casually bestowed on a strange face, from the fellow-worshippers who were equally strange to her.

The country people—most of them farmers and farm-servants with the village hand-loom weavers—tramped and tumbled in, with the

want of ceremony which used to distinguish a Scotch rural congregation. The minister and precentor took their places, and Jean fixed mute imploring eyes on the latter as if the decision of her fate rested with him. He was a homely, elderly man, distinguished among his compeers by the *sobriquet*, derived from his office in the kirk, of 'Singing Johnny,' a souter by trade, but a less thirsty and a more theological souter than his great namesake. As he rose for the secular rite which in Scotland precedes the religious services, even the most austere devout listened attentively with human interest. And if the congregation had only known, so as to watch a young woman in the obscurity of the back seats, they might have been aroused by the fading of the rich colour in her face, the rigid set of her mouth, and the desperate light as of a creature at bay, in what ought to have been her reasonable grey eyes, to comprehend that her hands were clasped tight—even

clenched—under the shelter of the book-board in an agony.

Johnny dallied with the matter in hand, perfectly unaware of the torture he was inflicting. He laboured under no press of business as at Martinmas or Whitsunday; this was a sabbath between terms when little was doing in Johnny's line. He was able to rise in a deliberate manner, to sleek down his stubbly hair as he was wont to do, before raising the psalm tune, to look around him with even more philosophical indifference; indeed, the only customary act which he refrained from doing as if to distinguish his secular from his religious duties, was that of putting up his hands before his mouth and giving a preliminary cough behind the screen. At last he proclaimed sonorously: 'There is a purpose of marriage between Tammas Proodfit and Ailison Clink-scales—for the second time,' not that the purpose had been entertained, dropped and re-

sumed, but that the announcement had been made before and would ring out once again in the ears of the listening kirk.

One woman was listening intently with bent head as if she would fain catch even the sound of a pin's fall, through the thick tumultuous beating of her heart. At the words spoken there was the faintest rustle of relaxation in her attitude. The couple whose intention had been thus sounded abroad were entire strangers to her. What had she to do with a Tammas Proodfit and an Ailison Clinkscapes, or what had they to do with her? It was not to hear them 'cried' that she had walked ten miles across the moor.

After the proclamation there was a distinct pause, which had the air of being instituted for sensational effect, unless Johnny had no more 'purposes of marriages' in the background to fire off at the congregation.

One fainting heart leapt up with half wild

relief and joy. After all it was a base report without a word of truth in it. Bob was to be proved innocent as the babe unborn.

Woe's me! Johnny was even then fumbling with another set of lines in his horny fingers; he lifted up his voice afresh and called all present to witness that there was also a purpose of marriage 'between Robert Meffin and Leezbeth Red for the first time.' Having discharged his lay functions, he stopped abruptly to look up, in expectation of the folded paper which the minister rose and bent over the pulpit to hand to him, taking Singing Johnny into his confidence as it were, with regard to the psalms and paraphrases appropriate to the sermon, which were to be sung during the service, for which the precentor was to find the fitting tunes on the spur of the moment.

Even after the commencement of the second proclamation, the formal employment of the full christian name struck so unfamiliarly on

Jean's ears, as to stay the flood of anguish for an instant longer, till the enunciation of the surname in company with the name she had heard given to her rival, rendered doubt no longer possible. It was all over, as Jean had heard said after her father and mother had drawn their last breath. It was too true: this was her Bob Meffin and no other whom she had heard cried with another woman in order to repair as far as might be a shameful wrong.

Jean felt like the rest of us when the catastrophe we have most dreaded has come upon us, that she had not known how much she had hoped against hope—how hard a battle hope had fought for bare life, till it lay slain stark and cold at her feet.

For she had not come there with any intention of protesting against the marriage which would be celebrated within the next few weeks. Such a step is even rarer in Scotland than in England; neither could there be any appeal

under the circumstances. It was only that Bob Meffin had lied to her and before the Lord, had fallen from what Jean had judged to be the glory of his manhood and dragged down another with him in his fall. Thenceforth the two who had been all in all could be less than nothing to each other.

Jean had listened to the sentence which blighted her youthful hopes, crushed her tenderest affections, and left her in the flower of her beauty, in all her sense and goodness, for no fault of her own, a lass 'lichtlied'—scorned before the world—that sorest humiliation to a woman. And it was all for the wiles of another lass with regard to whom Jean knew full well, without any vanity or arrogance on her part, that Leezbeth Red and such as she were not worthy to be named in the same breath with her—Jean, since they could not save either themselves or the men whom they had never loved with a noble unselfish love, from gross sin and degradation.

But unless in the involuntary shiver which ran through her—while long rays of sunshine were finding their way into the kirk windows and into the open door, lighting up and warming even the remotest corner—and in the breath drawn in and let out again with a dry inaudible sob, Jean gave no sign. She neither screamed nor fainted, she made no ‘dust’ or disturbance in the kirk of all places, she would have thought that neither maidenly—‘wiselike’ she would have called it—nor reverent. Bob Meffin was a fallen sinner, that was all, though it was enough for her to carry branded on her heart to her dying day. And she would never see or speak with him again, though she had loved him with all her heart. And what power of passion and depth of tenderness existed in that heart may be fairly conceived in the light of a biblical compliment which her master the minister once paid her. He had been watching Jean with his younger children when he

exclaimed suddenly, ‘ Jean, your mistress is right, you’re a fine young woman ; you remind me of that riddle of Samson’s, “ Out of the strong came forth sweetness.” ’

CHAPTER II.

BOB MEFFIN'S AMENDS.

FOURTEEN years passed — not without their changes. It was a fine frosty winter afternoon when two knots of homely men and women—forming two distinct coteries—were gathered at one end of Dalroy village, where, on the right side of the little street stood the Dalroy ‘smiddy,’ and on the left was ‘the smiddy well’—a dipping-in-well famous throughout the village for the excellence of its ‘tea-water. Horses were waiting to be shod round the smiddy door, while their temporary owners—dark figures in the ruddy glow of the furnace, prepared to hold their rustic parliament. At

the centre of attraction over the way maids and matrons took their turn in filling their cans and pitchers.

Very nearly at the same moment Jean Kinloch came in sight—emerging from the blue haze made up of the frost and the gloaming, while there was heard, with the peculiar distinctness of such a sound in such weather, the rumbling of a cart, with cart, horse, and driver still unseen, sounding louder and louder as it drew near in the opposite direction.

Jean had a plaid pinned over her cap, and carried a bright pitcher dangling lightly from one wrist; she was sniffing with satisfaction ‘the caller air,’ which sent her rich blood coursing through her veins, and yet not refusing to welcome the hot blast which met her as she crossed in front of the smiddy door.

Of course, Jean’s arrival was hailed before she was within ear-shot by a double chorus of half-approving, half-ironical comments—the

purport of which she could very well guess—beginning with ‘Here comes the Miss Fraser’s Jean.’

Jean had remained in the service of the Manse family all these years, though both the minister and his wife were dead, and the Manse was no longer the home of the remnant of the household. Impoverished as such remnants usually are, and consisting only of Jean’s young ladies, they could hardly have continued to live on, in genteel poverty, if Jean, who was so closely allied to them as to be styled theirs by inalienable possession, had not worked their double work on diminished wages.

‘Jean’s true to a minute,’ said another speaker, a man in the smiddy. ‘She’s nae daidler either at meat or wark.’

‘Ay, lasses, ye may stand about,’ a woman at the well took up the theme, without hearing the man’s contribution to the subject. ‘Jean Kinloch’s no sma’ graith—least of a’ in her ain

opinion.' It was like a version of that climax of commendation pronounced on the virtuous woman in Proverbs, 'Let her own works praise her in the gates,' with the grudging qualification that must have mingled with the praise.

Jean did not mind much either the concentrated scrutiny or the sifting analysis of her merits and demerits, to which, with her knowledge of the world, she knew she was exposed. Like a pillar of strength in her self-reliance and composure, her fine presence was unimpaired by her servant's costume, and her goodly prime untouched by any token of decay. Though she had not risen in worldly rank and prosperity, this was a very different Jean from the miserable lass, high-souled and innocent as she was, who had sat in a back seat in Logan Kirk to hear Bob Meffin cried with another woman.

Before Jean could say 'Gude day' to anybody, while she was still coming forward in the mingled lights of a cold primrose in the western

sky behind her, and a warm saffron from the glare of the smiddy at her right hand, the cart—the rumble of which had been constantly increasing—rattled up, bringing cart, horse, and driver into the illumination. And even before the din of its progress had ceased or the half-dazzled eyes could distinguish the face of the new comer, a voice, which seemed to issue from the past, suddenly called in eager excited tones, ‘Jean Kinloch!’

Jean turned startled, and with a shock even to her well-strung nerves, at the imperative summons. In spite of changes in the speaker, to which those in herself were infinitesimal, she recognised, without a moment’s hesitation, her old lover. She had not seen him since six months before that day in Logan Kirk, on the last occasion when the two had parted a fond loving lad and lass—a plighted bridegroom and bride. She had heard little of him in the interval, for his sister Eppie had married a

soldier and ‘followed the drum,’ while with her departure Jean had lost all chance of news of her recreant lover.

Taken by surprise as she was, Jean cried out with shaken accents, in turn, ‘Bob Meffin!’ Then she recalled, as any true woman would have recalled, instantaneously, the whole circumstances, the scene, the spectators. Some of them had known the two in their green youth, and were doubtless speculating already, with keen interest and a sense of the ridiculous, how Jean Kinloch would meet Bob Meffin now that the pair had reached the years of discretion—after what had once been between them, after the falseness of Bob which had separated them.

Jean was equal to the occasion; she stepped up to the cart, to which Bob sat nailed, with the intention of speaking to him, and doing her part in the interchange of such light questions and answers, as might be expected between old acquaintances who had known

each other well in youth, and who happened to encounter each other in later years. As to any nearer relation which had ever existed between them, Jean's attitude showed that she, at least, meant to behave as if she had forgotten it as utterly as the most trifling incident of her girlish days.

But unfalteringly as Jean carried out this line of conduct, in the few paces that intervened between her and Bob Meffin, which she crossed steadily with every eye upon her, and with her own eyes not fixed on the ground, but raised to catch his, she took in at a glance the whole man—including every indication of the transformation he had undergone since the last time she had seen him.

That Bob Meffin had been a gallant-looking young fellow in his degree, stalwart, lithe, fit to heave up the biggest sheaves on the stack which was in the process of building—as Jean had shorn foremost on her harvest rig—and to dance

longest and with lightest foot at harvest home or bridal.

This Bob Meffin was a broken-down, fast-ageing man, while Jean was still in her prime. His back was bent, while hers was straight; his hair had grown thin, and hung in uncared-for grey locks under his faded cap, while hers, in its undiminished profusion and without one dead white thread, was carefully disposed beneath her spotless white cap. His cheeks and forehead were weather-worn, dragged, and wrinkled, while hers remained fresh, round, and smooth. His working clothes had lost all the smartness with which the Bob Meffin of old had worn his most patched jacket and most clay-clogged shoon. Before that lightning-flash of womanly observation, they gave evidence of such untidiness and neglect in absent buttons, ragged cuffs, and the frayed, dangling ends of his neckerchief, as not only cast the utmost discredit on the wife who had supplanted Jean, but told in graphic language that

Bob had lost all personal pride and even proper sense of what was due in the dress of a respectable ploughman, who had risen to be foreman over the younger men on the farm.

Here were the wrong doer and the wrong sufferer. A fine moral could have been pointed from the difference between them, even though a hair-splitting casuist might have urged that it was not a case of retribution alone, since the constant exposure and the coarse fare of a ploughman, even when he carries the clearest of consciences within his bosom, is apt to tell upon him betimes, and make him look elderly before he is forty. As for Jean, though she had undergone 'a disappointment,' having continued in domestic service, she had of necessity missed such parallel drudgery and lack of sufficiently nourishing food, as she had once looked forward to willingly and cheerfully. But such causes make the ploughman's wife keep pace with her husband in ageing prematurely.

Still Bob Meffin had altered with a ven-

geance ; and Jean could hardly believe the testimony of her eyes and was impressed by the change. For surely nobody will say that because Adam delved and Eve span, because Jean had been a servant lass and Bob a ploughman all their respective lives, they had not the feelings of their kind, so that Jean should fail to have a sensitive perception that her former hero had lost, in the rough battle of life, all the glamour with which he had once been surrounded ?

Was Jean pleased that it should be so ? That she had lived to see how Bob Meffin had been punished for his desertion of her and degradation of another ? She could not tell, there was such a tumult of pride and pain in her heart.

But she went up to him where he sat and said with the easiest manner imaginable, ‘ Is this you, Bob ? How are you, and how are your wife and bairns ? ’

‘My wife!’ cried Bob aghast. ‘Do you no ken, Jean, she’s dead and gane a year and a half syne?’

Jean received another shock in which there were appalling elements. The dead woman had been one against whom Jean—Christian woman as she was—had borne a sore grudge for many a day. Nay, only a moment ago, Jean had been sharply summing up, with rising disdain and not without a sense of bitter satisfaction, what she had reckoned as so many unanswerable proofs of Leezbeth Red’s wifely incompetency, while all the time Jean’s successful rival had passed away long months ago without Jean’s knowledge, to give in her—Leezbeth’s—account to the Great Judge.

‘Poor woman!’ said Jean more softly; ‘she had gotten her ca’ early.’

‘She was never a strong woman,’ said Bob, speaking without the awkwardness which must have accompanied the discussion of his living

wife's qualities with Jean. He spoke also with that little hush of reverence, which is found in every man or woman with a spark of generosity and awe in the soul, when he or she refers to the dead—once so near, but who has gone far beyond all kindly communion and familiar every-day life.

In addition Bob showed that grave composure of regret which might be expected from a reasonable man and a widower whose grief was a year and a half old. 'Leezbeth was silly from the time of our marriage,' continued Bob, not uttering a supercilious reflection on the limited mental capacity of his wife, simply expressing himself in the vernacular for delicate health. 'She had mostly to keep her bed, for the last year or twa of her life.'

That sentence explained much. The misfortune of having married a sickly wife doomed to die prematurely, may only serve to call forth the deeper tenderness of the rich man whose personal independence and the neces-

saries—nay, the soothing solaces of whose life, remain altogether untouched by the calamity. But it is a crushing blow to the poor man, however faithfully and gallantly he may bear it. Bob's slouching gait, haggard face, grey hair and uncared-for clothes were all easily accounted for now, without farther severe reflection either on himself or on his dead wife. They spoke of hard work doubled when rest should have come; of the son of the soil returning from his day's darg,

Wat, wat, wat and weary,

with neither a blazing ingle nor a clean hearth-stone, not a single creature-comfort to sustain him; of ill or uncooked food such as a dainty townbred beggar would have turned from in supreme disgust; of a father who had to be father and mother in one to his helpless children; of long nights of waking and watching for the labouring man whose sleep ought to have been sweet.

Jean, who understood the circumstances so

well, was not the woman to be unmoved by them. 'But your bairns, Bob?' she suggested kindly, turning instinctively to what seemed to her the single prospect of better days for the speaker. 'They will be getting on, and rising up to be a blessing to you?'

'They are that already, woman,' said Bob heartily, while his careworn face brightened inexpressibly, 'though the auldest of the two lasses, Lizzie and Peggy, is but growing thirteen, and they have to take turn and turn about at their schulin' and at keepin' the house. They are as gude and clever, though I should na say sae, as lasses can be. My word! Jean, they can kindle a fire and put out a bannock that would not disgrace yoursel'.'

Here was a trace of the old Bob with his impetuosity and sanguineness. Jean smiled faintly in listening to him, even while she asked herself sternly, how she could be such a weak and wicked sinner as to feel a pang of

jealous resentment shoot through her. It was because she heard this poor man who had suffered so much, refer in terms which proved his high esteem for the only thing of value that remained to him—his bairns and Leezbeth Red's—not Jean's—to her, who must go a lone woman to her grave through his treachery.

‘For the bit laddie,’ continued Bob with a slight fall and wistful yearning in his voice, ‘he’s but a wee chappie of three years. We lost twa weans between him and the lasses. He’s no stout—I’m whiles frightened that he has his mither’s constitution. But his sisters and a gude auld body of a wife in our cotton do the best they can for him, and wha kens but that we’ll be permitted to pu’ him through—and live to see him a braw man some day?’ Bob lifted his bent head with glistening eyes at the remote but inspiring prospect.

Jean thought of a manse child that had died in its infancy, on which she had doted as

women like her are apt to lavish passionate affection on little children. 'I hope sae too, Bob, my man,' she said in the kindly phraseology of her class, and addressing him all the more gently, because she sought, in her own mind, to atone for the unreasonable, unrighteous anger she had felt stirring in her heart against him, for his very fatherliness, only a moment before. 'I'll be right glad to hear that your laddie has thriven.'

Bob's face brightened more and more, as he leapt down from the cart-head, and stood by Jean's side. But in spite of the decided action a certain hesitation and agitation began to appear in his manner.

The movement served to remind Jean of what she had been losing consciousness of, that she and Bob Meffin were central figures in an attentive circle scrutinising their proceedings, and probably catching scraps of their conversation.

‘Jean,’ said her old lover, lost to, or careless of, their public position, a broken red rising in his face while his eyes fell before hers, ‘I’m pleased to have seen you here, lass; and I own I had a notion we might forgather, after I had been with the cart for draff at the brewery, and made up my mind to come this way, because I had a doubt about a nail in ane of Bruce the horse’s shoon—the back fit on the hinder side—which Jamie Caird could put richt. Jean, I leed to you when we were young, I’ll never deny it; but oh! woman, ye dinna ken what it is for a man to own to a lee, whether to man or woman. And ye dinna ken how I was tempted—a thochtless lad as I was, in the same place with a bonnie fulish young lass who took a liking to him, and would let him see her heart richt or wrang. Jean, I’ll no say ill of the dead to whom I did wrang, who was the mither of my bairns. She did her best, puir feckless thing, when she had

gotten me—no sic a bargain after all, since I was neither so clever nor so handy as to make up for her lack of pith and experience—and she was a tried woman, racked wi' pain and faint with heart sickness, longing to be gane to her rest, her worst enemy might have pitied her, puir Leezbeth ! long before she gaed aff the face of the earth. I would be a muckle brute to blame her at this time of the day, and to throw a' the wyte of my faut on her. Still, Jean, the truth must be spoken, and gin ye had kenned, even at the time, there was some puir excuse for a moment's madness of passion and its miserable consequences—you were aye so strong yoursel' that you micht hae had some mercy on the weak—and we were weak as water, baith Leezbeth and me. But it's a' ower now, Jean, and you are to the fore and a “wanter” yet. Woman, gin you would suffer me to make some amends—a' that's in my power. I've keepet my place and risen to

be foreman at Blawart Brae in spite of a'. I've gude thirty pounds a year o' wages, and I've paid up my debt this last twalmonth. If I had onybody to manage for me I micht do weel yet. It's not to certain puirtith I'm bidding you, Jean. And there's my little cummers,' continued the infatuated man, with a flash of exultant hope, well-nigh conviction, at the mention of his young daughters; 'they will be proud to do your will, and wait on you like a queen; you could rear them into fine women like yoursel'. The wee chappie would be a fash to you, no doubt, but you are never the woman to heed sic fash, and oh! lass, you dinna ken what a takin' way he has wi' him, how he is the pet of ilka body that comes near him, though he's ill-grown and weakly. He tholes his trouble like a bit man, and when he's no clean knocked on the head wi't, and wallied like the young grass in simmer-time when there has not been a shower to slocken

its drouth for sax weeks, he's the plaisantest o' God's creatures you ever saw. Jean, you would like Jockie as gin he were your ain, and you micht be the saving of my laddie,' pleaded Bob passionately, as he had never pled before, not even for Jean's young love.

Jean was so confounded at the turn matters had taken, and the advantage Bob Meffin was seeking to wrest from her pity, and the softening of her heart towards him and his, that she hardly gave their full meaning to the first words of this second suit, and it was not for a moment that the extent of their presumption struck her. 'The deil's in the man!' Jean said under her breath, in spite of her principles, her decorum, and the recollection that she had served in a minister's family for a large part of her life. Was there no end to the conceit of men, in themselves and their bairns? And so he thought he could make her amends! Doubtless he imagined she was still hankering

after his fickle love, and pining for his sake, while she being an honest woman had banished him from her thoughts, as a married man, fourteen years before. By his careless use of the slighting term 'wanter,' which complaisant contemptuous married couples applied to single men but particularly to single women, he betrayed that he shared in the coarse popular scorn of old maids, and the mean opinion that they would be only too glad to snatch at any—the most wretched, chance of changing their condition and escaping from its reproach. He, the middle-aged, battered, and broken-down ploughman with his two forward hempies of lasses, and his heavy handful of a sick bairn, concluding impudently that any husband was better than none, judged himself a fit match for an independent well-esteemed woman like Jean Kinloch! And he had been the very man, the leear, as he had rightly called himself, to the one woman, the worst enemy to the

other, of the two who had trusted him. He had wrung Jean's heart when it was young and tender, and lichtlied her for a lass like Leezbeth Red, leaving Jean to be the mark for the jests and scoffs of mocking tongues.

Jean was burning with indignation, and looking at it in her light, greater provocation could not have been given her. 'Are you daft, Bob Meffin?' She turned upon him with a pale face set like iron, and words which cut like swords. 'Do you think I would have a gift of you, after what has come and gane? If I had been brodent on a man, I might have had my wale of a hantle better than you ever were, without waiting so long. Man, I'm weel content to be an auld maid, it's no sic a forlorn lot as you marriet folk in your crouseness fancy. But I would be keen to get marriet gin I could consent to stand in a dead woman's shoon, a lass who was like to have had "a misfortune"'—Jean used the apologetic phrase with

strong contempt—‘ who had so little truth and honesty in her that she could steal the fickle man’s heart and word which were not worth the taking, though they had been flung at her feet, kennin’ a’ the time they belonged to another woman—would I be plaguet wi’ her brats o’ bairns, think ye?’

Bob heard the terms of her answer with as much amazement as she had experienced at his proposal, with consternation added to the amazement, and with the pain of a great disappointment in the crestfallen and wounded expression of his face.

But at the last scornful words the man’s spirit kindled within him. He faced Jean, and replied to her with volleys of wrath: ‘Jean Kinloch, you may cast laith at me, you’ve ower gude richt, though I thocht—I was wrang—a’ the same I had a fulish notion it would be grander to forgi’e and forget, and that the lass I had lo’ed sae weel, when there was naebody to

come atween us, micht be fit to play the grander part. But to cast laith at the silent dead for the wrong-doing of her youth, after she has paid the heavy cost—to cast laith, to my face, at my innocent bairns, my twa gude lasses and my stricken laddie, Jean Kinloch, you were na blate.’

‘Na, Bob, I didna mean—’ began Jean hesitatingly, but he would not hear her.

‘You’ve done what I’ll stand frae no man or woman born, no frae the woman I aince lo’ed as I lo’ed my life, and whom even when I gaed her up, because I couldna say “na” either to mysel’ or to anither, I would hae focht ony mither’s son in braid Scotland who would have dared to say that she was not amaist worthy to be worshipped. I thocht you were ower gude for me, and it was a comfort in repenting o’ my folly, that you were weel rid o’ me. But I tell you where you stand glowering there, you’re not the woman I thocht you ;

you're not gude enough for the gift o' my bairns that you have spoken tantingly o'—Jean Kinloch, you're a hard, cauld woman this day.'

This was turning the tables in truth, and an astounding effect followed.

Bob Meffin's words could hardly be called reasonable, and yet the utterance of them seemed to lift him above his fall and to lend a homely dignity to the sinner, as he walked away from the old love to whom he had not been true.

Jean felt it with a curious force. She had the strongest conception that Bob Meffin, who had jilted her in the past and was insulting her in the present—as she had thought only a moment before, who defended his dead wife and loved his children so fondly, was having the best of it in their contest. He had been foolish and false in word and deed, he might be what she had called him—the most conceited and

audacious of men. He might share in the low views current as to 'wanters' and old maids, yet could it be that Bob Meffin had grown a better man than Jean was a woman, while he had been the sinner and she the sinned against? Had the simple, manly patience with which he had paid the penalty reversed the result in character, in the subtle workings by which good may triumph over evil? Had Bob become less and she more worldly-minded since they parted? Had his nature been softened, mellowed, purified in his ceaseless toil for his sick wife and helpless children, while she in her comparative ease, her leisure for her bible and her kirk, had lost sight of magnanimity and mercy and learnt only vindictiveness and malice? And if so, had she not been doubly defrauded? Was Bob to cheat her not only of earthly, but of heavenly happiness?

Jean's sense of justice rebelled against the merest bewildered suspicion of such a sentence.

But she was sorry for the words she had spoken ; she had been mean enough to cherish the recollection of Bob's offence after all these years, and, with a full knowledge of the apples of Sodom it had borne, to cast it up' to the offender. And he had been perfectly right in his accusation—she had 'cast laith' at the dead wife whose soul had gone before the great tribunal—at Leezbeth Red's and Bob Meffin's innocent bairns, thus outraging the most sacred feelings of humanity. As Jean was a good woman she must take back her words in part, she must say she was sorry for having uttered them.

'Forgi'e me, Bob,' she said in a low tone, her handsome face working with suppressed emotion. 'It was sma' of me and unworthy of a Christian woman to let on about byganes—no to say it was cruel to say an unbecoming word o' your dead wife and your living bairns.'

Alas ! the original mercurial temperament

of the man which no suffering had altogether subdued, leapt up on the slightest encouragement from the depth of alienation and despondency to the height of fresh love and hope. He was not merely propitiated, he was elevated by a single word of regret so as to be ready to repeat the affront he had given. ‘Will you no think better of it, Jean, lass, and make me a prood and happy man at last?’ he called out loudly and recklessly. Jean’s recent remorse for her harshness was nipped in the bud, and she was furious at the renewed outrage. ‘No me, niver, niver,’ she proclaimed to him and to all who might choose to listen.

CHAPTER III.

JEAN'S REPRISALS.

EPPIE MEFFIN had returned with her soldier, a full-blown sergeant in possession of a comfortable pension, to settle in her native village. And Jean went to congratulate her old friend, but found that condolences instead of congratulations were in requisition.

Eppie stood bathed in tears with her good bonnet and shawl thrown on anyhow, in her haste to set out for the Dalroy railway-station, which was now within three miles of the village, while the train stopped for five minutes at another station a mile from Logan, on its way to a place of greater note.

‘Come a bittie with me, Jean, it’s lang since we’ve seen ane anither, lass. I take your early visit very kind, and am fain to hear your cracks, but I canna stop to speak to you,’ said Eppie, without waiting to be questioned on the cause of her distress.

Jean complied with the petition, excited almost out of her staid maidenly composure. And her companion was not slow to pour forth her lamentations over the misfortune that had befallen her, through all that was left of her kindred.

‘Oo, aye, it’s that unlucky Bob : you may be satisfied now, Jean, you ha’e lived to see vengeance execut’ on him—as they say, it’s aye ta’en—even in this world, on the deceivers and deserters o’ women.’

‘Me satisfied !’ cried Jean in unfeigned horror ; ‘what do you tak me for, Eppie Meffin ? Do you think I wish, or ha’e ever wished, an ill wish on your brither ? You’re speakin’ like an

unregenerate heathen. Is't his ae bit laddie?' inquired Jean almost tenderly.

'It's a hantle waur than the bairn,' groaned Eppie. 'I canna help liking the wee thing who is no accountable for a' the fash he gies; but 'deed he would be weel awa', at rest from a' his pains.'

'Oh! Eppie, Eppie,' said Jean reproachfully, 'when Bob's heart is set on this bairn, and ane can never tell what the silliest callant may come through, and live, and grow to; you a mither yoursel' to speak sic words!'

'You speak o' me bein' a mither,' said Eppie with a half-choked voice, 'woman, you dinna ken what the outcome o' a mither's love may lead to, though you're gude—you were aye a gude lass, Jean Kinloch. There's my ain brisk mannie Peter. Do you think if I had the choice, and if I kenned I was to be ta'en away frae him, and his father was to forfeit his pension and become superannuate', I wouldna

rather choose to have a' the briskness ta'en out of my laddie, and see him lying still—never to stir mair—only fit for the mools, than look forward to a chance of his comin' to want, and fa'n on the parish, and being knocked about and scorned, and treated to a dog's life ?'

'Then it's Bob himsel', said Jean briefly.

'Wha else should it be ?' demanded Eppie, made peevish by her grief.

'Ye dinna say he's dead ?' said Jean, with white lips.

'No dead outright,' said Eppie, not so grateful as she ought to have been for the great respite, never having contemplated the extremity, 'but he is no muckle better, so far as being a bread-winner is concerned. He was trying to break in a maisterfu' horse, when it turned and flung at him, and struck him atween the elbow and the shouther. His arm—and it's his richt ane—is that melled the doctor is feared the banes will never gang thegither again, and he

may have to cut it aff bodily. If poor Bob survive the operation, and be left an ae-armed man, he'll no even be fit for a hag man' (the used-up man who is the cattle-feeder on a farm). 'His maister may do something for him, so long as he lives, since the hurt was got in his service, but Bob cannot be allowed mair than will provide for his ain bite and sup, and what is to become of his bairns even in his lifetime Gude can tell. Me and my man nicht take ane o' the halflin lassies, but we could do nae mair; and little as the like o' her is gude for, she's like to be ill spared with her faither as weel as her little brither thrown on her and her sister's care. Pity me! for the care, wi' the auldest of the twa hardly in her teens. Now, Jean, when you've heard a' will you flee out on me again for wishing the weary wean were safe in a better place?'

Jean was silent in the magnitude of the calamity.

At this moment Eppie had only one complaint to make of the victim, and she did not dream of including Jean in it, for Eppie was a loyal friend as well as an attached sister. She had heard already how Bob as a widower had ventured to make up to Jean Kinloch again, and so far from approving of the venture, Eppie, in fairness to her sex, and still more in fairness to Jean, had said stoutly, unswayed by family interest and partiality, that Bob was rightly served in the repulse he had received. He had no reason to count on any other answer. He was both bold and simple to speer Jean Kinloch's price a second time. There had always been a simplicity about him, poor chap, though he was no fool either. Doubtless that had been the cause of his falling an easy victim to the wiles of that light-headed cutty Leezbeth Red—that Eppie should miscall the dead. But Eppie's auld mother, who had a great work with Jean, could never abide

Leezbeth. Thus Eppie took refuge from any self-reproach for the disparaging criticism on her late sister-in-law, by regarding it as a mark of filial respect.

‘ You ken, Jean, it’s a mercy, “there was never a silly Jocky but there was aye as silly a Jenny,” and some canny woman, a wee bit up in years, wi no muckle to lippen to, nicht have drawn up wi’ Bob and his foreman’s house and wages. And what though she had been a thocht ill-faured?’ speculated Eppie boldly, ‘she would not ha’e made a waur wife and step-mither because of the shape of her nose or the colour of her skin. Of course I dinna mean a weel-to-do, weel-looking woman like you, Jean,’ broke off Eppie in perfect sincerity; ‘a match like that was no longer to be thought of for him. If you were inclined to change your state, you nicht aspire as high as a butler or a schulemaister. But about the woman that might ha’e done for our Bob afore this mis-

chanter—if she had not been a fule o’ a lassie—caring only for idleset and a reive at whatever pleasure came in her way—she would not ha’e been that ill aff. Puir Bob has learnt to serve hissel’ and to be easy served, and his patience wi’ these bairns o’ his, and his pleasure in them, is jist extraordinar’.

‘Yes,’ Jean said half abstractedly, ‘he seemed to think a deal o’ his bairns.’

‘Nae doubt, ilka craw thinks its ain bird whitest, and Bob’s birds were aye birds o’ Paradise. No that I would deny they’re fine lasses as lasses gang, but will that prevent them being frichtet out o’ their wits if Bob has to get his arm chapped aff? and if he come round, how long will they be, think ye, of forgetting the trouble and getting out their heads? And how can I, wi’ a man and bairns and a house o’ my ain to look after, and a railway journey atween me and Bob’s family, keep the lasses out of a’ but good company, and set them

down and haud them on their seats, at their seams and their knittin', and teach them to be orderly and punctual and weel-mannered,' said the sergeant's wife with emphasis. 'No that it matters muckle since it has come to the warst,' she added the next moment, sinking back into dejection. 'I see nae way now for them but they maun gang on the parish—that ever ony o' my folk should come to this!' Eppie ended with fresh tears of mingled personal mortification and grief for 'our Bob.'

Jean tarried a couple of weeks, hearing various reports of Bob's keeping up or giving way—of the youngest of his doctors maintaining that he would both save the arm and restore it to usefulness, only months of suffering and helplessness must intervene—of the eldest of his doctors swearing that Bob's arm, if it were not amputated at once, would cost him his life at no distant day. Jean could bear it no longer. Her punishment, not Bob's, was

more than she could bear. She would 'take her foot in her hand,' go across the moor, and ask how Bob Meffin fared. She was an old enough woman to decide for herself on the desirability of such a step. She was old enough in her rank of life to be her own chaperon, and dispense with the presence of Eppie on her visit.

Jean was not accustomed to railways as her travelled friend was, so it did not occur to her to lessen the fatigue of the expedition by having recourse to the station, nearly three miles off, and being carried by the iron horse and deposited a mile from her destination. To Jean, by far the simpler and less troublesome course was to 'take her foot in her hand' and walk the ten miles to Logan.

It was already the month of February, and the days were lengthening, though spring was making little show in the woods and fields, and least of all on the moor.

Jean accomplished this journey as she had

accomplished that other, with the frost-bitten instead of the blooming heather under her feet, and the former summer sky still grey with wintry clouds over her head. It was not the sabbath day, so Jean was not called upon to redeem the holy time by speaking to herself in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, as she trod the long and hard road ; but she caught herself muttering involuntarily half aloud more than once, ‘ God be gude to Bob Meffin and his mitherless bairns.’ And she was conscious, through her anxiety, that peace with God and man, instead of restless misery, filled her breast.

Jean passed the kirk where she had sat and heard Bob ‘ cried ’ with another woman, as it seemed to her an age ago—passed the kirkyard where Leezbeth Red lay sleeping. She knew the road to Blawart Brae perfectly well. Had she not learnt its every turning by heart in the days when she had thought of the farm in the light of her home as a young wife? Bob’s pre-

sent house was not, indeed, the house which that young wife would have dwelt in, the last was tenanted by one of the junior ploughmen and his wife—no older than Jean would have been if she had come to Blawart Brae a married woman by the time she was twenty. Jean caught a glimpse of a young lass whose brown hand was already invested with the dignity of a wedding-ring, as she looked up and paused in the act of pulling up a curly green kail-stock from her ‘yaird.’ Jean stared wistfully at the fresh contented face as at a picture of what her own face might have been like, if Bob Meffin had not broken his vows more than a dozen of years before.

Bob’s cottage was that of the foreman on the farm, but the little advantages which the promotion secured had all been lost in the grinding poverty to which he had been subjected.

Bob himself opened the door to Jean’s

knock, for he was able to walk about the house, though his arm was still in an early precarious stage of recovery.

‘Eh ! Jean, is this you ? Come in by ; it’s kind of you to look in and speer for me in the by-going, since you maun ha’e some other errand at Logan.’ He cried with such glad surprise, that Jean had no more cause to fear the nature of her welcome.

He insisted upon her occupying the one arm-chair, and he would break up with his left hand the little fire gathered on the hearth, while he kept repeating, as in a wonderfully pleasant dream, ‘Is’t possible you’ve come aince errand to see me ? Woman, the sicht of you is gude for a sick man ;’ and Jean knew that he admired her fine carriage and fine face as of old—that to him, as to the rest of the world, she was still the well-endowed, the well-not the ill-favoured woman whom Eppie had proposed as a fit wife for her brother.

As for him, he looked fifty times more haggard and worn than when Jean had seen him sitting, still able-bodied and active, on the head of his cart between the smiddy and the well, in the winter gloaming. His cheeks were more sunken, his hair had received an additional white powdering, his very voice piped a little with weakness, his fustian clothes naturally were worse—not better, attended to, while his right arm, that sign and seal of a working man's independence, hung pathetically incapable of service in its sling.

But he was eager, even cheerful, in his greetings to Jean. At the same time it was clear that though he had no regrets to spare for his personal appearance, he was full of apologies for his house which might throw discredit on the management of his young housekeepers. Both of them were absent for the moment, since Lizzie had carried out her little brother, and Peggy, who had returned to the

parish school, was not come back for the day.

To tell the truth, Jean saw Bob's house when it was about its best, while he remained constantly at home to give directions to his lasses, and when his sister Eppie came over, once a fortnight, expending her surplus energy and emotion in scouring not only the family wardrobe, but the windows and the grate.

But it was a house bare and barren in its small space, as the great ward of a poor-house, while it was liable to the squalor the absence of which is the redeeming feature of the poor-house. Here there was not one of the articles which are the pride of a well-to-do ploughman's heart, and which make all the difference between 'couthiness' (plenty and comfort combined) and dreariness in his homely dwelling. In Bob's house there was no chest of drawers rubbed by proud patient hands—such as Jean had been once laying by ten shillings

of her wages at a time to buy ; no grandiose eight-day clock with perhaps a wreath of brilliant pink roses and gorgeous blue convolvuluses painted round its broad face, to which Bob in the heyday of his fortunes had aspired ; no coarse but gay earthenware, for show as well as for use, in the cupboard with its glass door ; no resplendent coloured engravings of worse than doubtful merit as works of art, but bright suggestive spots relieving the staring or dingy blankness of the white-washed walls ; no exquisitely patched quilt—a marvel of womanly ingenuity and industry, such as Jean had once stitched together and sung over, and laid aside to fade in her kist—adorning the box-bed. There was not even a cat purring about the ‘ clean hearth-stane,’ or a bird chirping in its cage, or a growing plant on the ledge of the small window. Yet Bob as a young man had been fond of animals and plants. Only there had been hard times in his history. Then a cat, in

it did not cast aside its domestic habits and run wild about the stack-yard and barn, killing rats and mice which Bob might have been tempted to grudge it, for its own consumption, would have grown as lean in flesh and as unthrifty in coat as Bob himself. The pence to be paid for an ounce of bird-seed might have formed a far larger sum than he, with any conscience, would have dared to abstract from the family capital. The burdened man could not have given the moment's thought and time necessary to supply the 'flooer' with the common sunshine, air, and water—all that it craved.

Jean, who had been thinking much of late of her old comfortable manse-kitchen glittering with pewter, tin and brass, the very roof groaning with the weight of mutton hams, pigs' cheeks, dried fish, bags of onions, bunches of herbs, contrasted it with this region of desolation, but did not shrink from the contrast.

Jean and Bob chatted together one on each side of the flickering fire—the blinking of which was more kindly than the pale February sunbeams, which shone steadily on the dispiriting house-place.

But Bob was not down-hearted: he was wonderfully hopeful, as, by the Providence which makes the back fit for the burden, it was his nature to be. He was ready to praise to the skies the cleverness and kindness of his young doctor—Bob having affectionately appropriated his medical man, with a certain proud admiration and tenderness for his gifts and his youth, much as Jean had appropriated her young mistresses, dwelling with fond delight on their graces. Bob proclaimed with unstinted gratitude the generosity of his master, who was paying in full a term's wages which the servant had not earned, and only putting an orra (extra man) man into Bob's place, till it could be ascertained whether he should recover from

the effects of his accident, as Bob was well assured he would in time, if it were the Lord's will—he used the expression without the slightest affectation. Eppie was a good sister to him, while all his neighbours were richt kind. He could better thole the pain of his arm now, that he had the comfort of trusting it was not to be sawn off. Bob said the words without shrinking and with manly fortitude. He had been in worse straits and seen far greater ‘trouble,’ and he had much to be thankful for. There was no more pretence in the acknowledgment of thankfulness than in the reference to his Maker's will. Bob was one of those wayfaring men who, though a fool, was prevented, in part by his very simplicity, from erring in his judgment of the way he had to go through life and death.

Then he quietly dropped his own affairs and turned with kindly interest to discuss Jean's concerns, and also to hear the news of old ac-

quaintances which could only reach him and Jean orally, and could never come to them through any humble substitute for 'Fashionable News' in West-end newspapers. Bob could and did read stray newspapers, but they rarely brought him intelligence of the doings of friends old or new, and news were especially acceptable to Bob in these weeks of enforced idleness and pain, from which, though he bore the infliction bravely, he was fain to have his mind diverted for an hour. He took the friendliest interest in the changes going on in Jean's 'family,' which happened at that moment to be looking up in the world, while now and then that very interest betrayed him into precarious allusions. 'So Miss Mary is to be buckled with young Logan o' Logan! I mind her weel as a bairn. She was the little leddy wi' the lint white locks I ha'e carried on my shouther many a time—you mind, Jean? when there was a lock o' us among the minister's hay.

And Miss Catrine's to go back to the manse—how bools rin round! and she wants you to go back wi' her. You'll do't, Jean,' said Bob with cordial confidence. 'You'll like the auld place far better than Logan House after young Logan has come to his kingdom. The manse o' Dalroy was a bonnie pairt and a happy hame even for a servant lass in the auld days. I've no doubt it will be as nearly as possible the same, under Miss Catrine who comes o' a gude stock and the young minister who I am told has the making o' a powerful preacher in him, while he is a kind man to the pair. I'm as pleased as you can think, Jean, to hear o' your down-sitten in the end—for you'll never leave them, they'll never let you go. Woman, you'll be an honour to their house among their young maids; you'll be like Rebeecy's nurse whom all Israel murned for, that the auld Doctor aince preached about, and you could turn up chapter and verse, and read what was said o' her in the "Word."

‘Thanks to you, Bob,’ said Jean in a low tone, conscious of his self-forgetfulness.

But all through the conversation Bob was alert for any sign of the return of his bairns. He was extremely desirous that they should come home in time for Jean to see them before she left. ‘I wouldna like to keep you ower long, Jean, when you have siccan a tramp between toons, and it was mair than kind of you to come. But if you could just aince cast een on the bairns, if you could see Jockie and tell me what you think o’ him, I would like it aboon a’ things. If I were at their heels,’ cried Bob, waxing hot in his great longing to bring about the introduction, ‘I would try if a gude paik wouldna put smeddum in them. But you ken bairns will be bairns,’ he turned the next moment and craved indulgence for his culprits. ‘They will find things to play wi’, were it but a wheen burrs to stick on ane anither’s backs, and keep them ahint on the road.’

At last the members of Bob's family arrived simultaneously, the lasses with their bleached hair and round rosy faces, and the puny little lad. Lizzie was lugging along her brother in her motherly young arms, Peggy had her bag with her books hung round her neck. There was no particular sign of that seeking to get their heads out of the yoke which Eppie had foreboded, though they might not have been guiltless of the light-heartedness of sticking burrs on each other's backs for the last quarter of an hour. But the two, and even the small child, having a spindly arm hanging loosely across the breast of his sister's blue pinafore, with his eyes looking large and hollow like his father's, in his wasted mite of a face, stared open-mouthed at Jean. In vain their father strove to do the honours with the best effect. 'Gie me the bairn, Lizzie. This is Lizzie and thon's Peggy, Jean ; and here's an auld friend of mine, lasses.'

In his deep anxiety that the children might

make a favourable impression on his old friend, Bob suddenly fell foul of the objects of his devotion with a sharpness of fault-finding which not only took them completely by surprise, but drove them into a frame of mind still more stupid and provoking.

‘Ha’e you no a tongue in your head, Lizzie?’ Bob reproached his eldest-born cuttingly. ‘And as for you, Peggy,’ he turned furiously on the second girl, ‘lowse that bag from your neck this minute, and put aff that bannet that you have a’ but torn the croon frae since you left hame this morning. What garred you be sae royd—and noo you are as blate, when I would have had you look wiselike and behave your best no to disgrace yoursel’s and me.’ Bob ended with a groan of disappointment—well-nigh despair.

Jean had to interfere with her womanly forbearance and consideration. ‘Let them alane, Bob. There’s naithing wrang. What

would you ha'e o' the bairns—fine bairns, who I am sure will do a' they can to please you?'

But Bob's heart melted utterly to his youngest-born, his son and heir, and he failed to attack him with scathing sarcasm. 'Here's Jockie,' he said, smiling on the child that nestled in his left arm. 'Tak him frae me, Jean, he'll no greet—he's the best manners o' us a'—he's sic a licht wecht, though he's a hantle heavier than he was six months syne, you'll no feel it, even though you're tired,' said Bob, putting his darling awkwardly with his one free hand into Jean's arms. He gave a sigh half of speechless satisfaction, half of unfathomable sorrow—looking in her face at the same time, seeking to hear her utter her tribute to the child's attractions, and hanging breathlessly on what was likely to be her outspoken verdict of whether it was to be life or death for the lad.

Jean took the bairn reverently and gently. He did not greet; in his weakness he appreciated

fully Jean's light firm grasp, while he cuddled to her breast and looked up in her face with his child's eyes. 'Puir wee lamb,' said Jean, sitting down again, for she had risen, as if his feather's weight had overpowered her strength ; and she stroked the wan cheeks till Jockie smiled with the ineffable sweetness of a sick child's smile.

'He looks far frae strong,' said truthful Jean slowly, while Bob listened to her words as if they had been those of an oracle. 'But I dinna think he has just the look that little Jack at the manse had—I ha'e a hope he'll get ower his sickness. Do you mind, Bob, your mither used to say you were a silly bairn yoursel' till you were sax years auld? and your Jockie has a look o' you.'

'Do you think sae, Jean?' said Bob, almost shame-faced at the extent of the compliment, while ready to bless her for the faintest encouragement to trust that Jockie might live to become a toil-worn, care-laden man like his father. But, no ; Jockie, if he were spared,

would have brighter fortunes ; no true father or mother has ever ceased to dream that his or her child will be more successful in the best sense—happier in every way, in the path trodden and cleared before him.

‘I canna keep you longer, Jean,’ said Bob reluctantly but with manly tender forethought for her. ‘And I canna expeck that sic a favour will be repeated. I canna even find words to express to you how much I’m obleeged for this ca’. But if we should never meet again in this world, you’ll mind, Jean, I said as my last words to you, that, like the Maister you ha’e served all your life, you’ve returned gude for evil, you have done what you could to cheer the heart of a sick and lanely man.’

It was the single word of complaint he had allowed to fall from him, and he only let it pass his lips to enhance the value of her good deeds.

The two had left the children in the room behind them, and were standing in the doorway about to part.

‘Bob,’ said Jean hurriedly, ‘I’m ready and willing to come again and stop, if you’re in the same mind that you were on the afternoon you spoke with me, at the smiddy well. The Miss Frasers have no more need o’ me. Eppie will gie in the lines and cite the minister to come here, and I’ll walk across the moor as soon as a’ is ready—if you are in the same mind, Bob.’

Jean spoke the words tremulously, but merely as a matter of course, in her recantation of her refusal. It was the thought farthest from her generous heart to choose this moment of all others in which to reproach him with his former faithlessness.

But as a wrong once done is indelible, the reproach of which Jean never dreamt, smote Bob’s conscience keenly, even while he protested vehemently, ‘I’m in the same mind. Could I be in any other to my auld true love Jean?’ And he cried again, ‘Oh, Jean! your tender mercies are baith kind and cruel,’ while he bowed

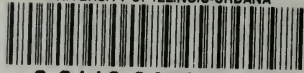
himself in such an agony of shame as he had never yet felt for the past. He had even, for an instant, a notion that it must be the bitterest part of his punishment to have to put away from him, with his own hand, this ecstasy of hope and happiness for the future—not of himself alone but of his children. ‘I canna let your mercies be, Jean, I daurna let them be,’ he muttered hoarsely.

‘Then I winna ask your leave, Bob,’ said Jean in her triumph of love, before the might of which Bob’s anguish and resistance went down.

‘It’s no me, it’s the bairns, who have won you, as I aye kenned they would,’ said Bob, taking heart again at the thought of his treasure; ‘and they will thank you as I couldna do—no, though I were to live to ninety-nine and never cease speaking your praises.’

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